

Having a Bath in Japan:  
A Biographical Study of Actress and Black Belt  
*Jūdōka* Sarah Mayer (1896-1957)

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## Abstract

In 1933, British actor and playwright, Sarah Mayer, left behind her wealthy husband, and the large country estate they shared in rural Hampshire, for a trip to Japan. As a judo enthusiast travelling as a sports tourist, Sarah became the first western woman in Japan to receive the award of *shōdan*, or first degree black-belt, for judo, from the Butokukai, an increasingly militaristic, pedagogical institution, aimed at continuing the study of traditional and modern fighting techniques. Sarah's training at the home of the art, the Kōdōkan in Tokyo, was encouraged by founder, Jigorō Kanō, a known internationalist in outlook. As the trip continued, the Japanese government promoted Mayer's tour as part of the drive for modernism. Primarily, this thesis analyses the reasons for her unprecedented acceptance as a Western woman by Kanō and the wider judo establishment.

Using a biographical framework, and drawing on a large volume of primary source research, this work places Sarah's achievement into a context of not only time and place, but social mobility and agency, considering, firstly, Sarah's life before she went to Japan. Central to the thesis, the work then continues with an in-depth study of her time in Japan and the height of her international fame as a sporting personality, concluding with her final years and reflecting on her precarious place within history.

Whilst contributing to the literature on gendered sporting performance and role models of the early twentieth century, this work should be seen as a revision of the limited historiography of women in judo, and also, to a lesser extent, the international politicisation of physical culture.

The politicisation of sport, particularly the fighting arts, is an important, and sometimes neglected area of sports history, particularly in the Western literature. Providing a gendered perspective on the international history of the growth and diversification of martial arts, this thesis investigates a crucial case study, encompassing overarching themes of class, individual agency and the wider political context of Anglo-Japanese relations.

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## Abbreviations.

A.F.L.: Actresses' Franchise League.  
G.R.O.: General Register Office, U.K.  
L.M.A.: London Metropolitan Archives.  
N.U.W.S.S.: National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.  
R.B.C.: The Richard Bowen Collection, University of Bath.  
T.N.A.: The National Archives, Kew, U.K.  
W.S.P.U.: Women's Social and Political Union.

## Glossary of Terms

*Budō*: An overall term describing the Japanese fighting or martial arts and their accompanying philosophies.  
*Butokukai*: Japanese national organisation for the study of *budō*.  
*Dan*: Grades of mastery in judo, awarded from first (*shōdan*) to tenth (*jūdan*).  
*Jūdōgi*: Outfit for practising judo.  
*Jūdōka*: Judo practitioner.  
*Jūjutsu*: Traditional Japanese fighting art, developed through many schools.  
*Jūjutsuka*: Jūjutsu practitioner.  
*Kendō*: Martial way using traditional Japanese fencing techniques, wearing armoured clothing.  
*Kendōgi*: Outfit for practising *kendō*.  
*Kyū*: Lower grades for judo leading to dan grade.  
*Randori*: In judo, free practice where opponents attempt to beat the other.  
*Rei – Hajime*: A judo match always begins with these words spoken by the teacher or referee, meaning *rei* – bow, *hajime* – begin.  
*Shiai*: In judo, fighting under contest conditions.

## Japanese Eras

Edo or Tokugawa Era: 1603-1868, ruled over by the Tokugawa Shoguns, defended by the Samurai classes. Ended with the Meiji Restoration.  
Meiji Era: 1868-1912, included the introduction of compulsory education partly modelled on Western conventions.  
Taishō Era: 1912-1926, saw The Great Kantō Earthquake. The endeavour for 'Racial Equality' dismissed by the West through The League of Nations.  
Early Shōwa Era: 1926-1945, The Second Sino-Japanese War and The Second World War fought.



## Notes

Japanese names used in this work are presented using the Japanese convention of family name first, with the exception of those who have become well-known in the English language using the English convention, such as Jigorō Kanō and Gunji Koizumi, or authors who have published widely in English.

Transliteration terminology – This work uses the Revised Hepburn system for the representation of Japanese terms in Latin script, with the use of macrons for lengthened vowels. Commonly used Japanese words however, such as judo and Tokyo, are presented in their anglicised form.

This work refers to a large number of original works, including newspaper and theatre publication articles and notices from the early twentieth century. Within these particular sources there is rarely the name of an author given, and therefore to avoid excessive repetition of ‘anonymous’ within the references, in these instances, where possible, the piece is identified by the column title, along with the specific publication and page number.

*Jūjutsu*: The English spelling of 柔術, has been many and varied. This work uses the standardised spelling of *jūjutsu* from the *Kōdōkan New Japanese-English Dictionary of Judo*.<sup>1</sup> This is supported by the *Kodansha Kanji Learner's Dictionary*, where 柔 is represented by *jū* with a lengthened vowel sound meaning soft, gentle, or yielding, and 術 is represented by *jutsu* meaning art or skill set.<sup>2</sup>

Although the use of the word actress is currently becoming outdated, this work uses the term, indicating its contemporaneous usage through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Place names are presented in the form in which they were known contemporaneously.

Unless otherwise indicated, archives, libraries and museums referenced are located in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> Teizō Kawamura and Toshirō Daigo, *Kōdōkan New Japanese-English Dictionary of Judo* (Tokyo: Kodokan Judo Institute 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Jack Halpern (ed), *The Kodansha Kanji Learner's Dictionary* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd 2001).

Within a biographical context, changes of the name of the subject throughout a lifetime, can create certain difficulties for historians. Sarah Mayer is a case in point. During the course of her life, Mayer underwent several name changes of both her forenames and surnames. From Winifred Sarah Tapping, the name she was given at birth, her forename changed to Winnie, Sarah and Sally, and her surname altered between Tapping, Benedict, Gibbons, Mayer and Ovington. This causes complications, not only for source research, but for lucidity within the written thesis. Therefore, for simplicity and clarity, this thesis refers to her as Sarah Mayer throughout, whilst of course referring to the names she used at any given time.



1. Photograph of Sarah Mayer, c. 1935, reproduced by kind permission of The Richard Bowen Collection.

## 1. Introduction

In 1998, judo historian Richard Bowen discovered seven letters sent from India and Japan in 1934 and 1935 by Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi, her *sensei* in England. The discovery was made in the archives of the Budokwai, or Way of Knighthood Society, a Japanese institution founded in London in 1918, by Koizumi, where its members engaged with Japanese culture and physical education. The Japanese martial arts have a strong link with history and tradition, and in 1882, Jigorō Kanō based his new form of judo on existing techniques of *jūjutsu*, soon establishing a school which he named the Kōdōkan, or the place to study the way. Judo, translated to *ju*-soft/gentle, *do*-way, uses yielding techniques, where the opponent's body weight is used against them, making it an obvious choice for women seeking combative expertise or exercise.

Mayer's letters described her trip to Japan where she studied judo, and they were accompanied by a set of photographs and various newspaper cuttings.<sup>1</sup> Through subsequent research undertaken by Bowen and the American historian Joseph Svinth, it was found that Mayer may have been the first Western woman in Japan to have been awarded a black belt.<sup>2</sup> In the letters, Mayer describes her extraordinary treatment by the Japanese judo elite, and how she trained in an unprecedented manner with male *jūdoka*. In 2000, Svinth transcribed the letters, making them available online, and Bowen's posthumously published 2011 study includes extracts from them.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent publications have also mentioned Mayer's achievements as a 'first' female

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<sup>1</sup> The letters are now held as part of The Richard Bowen Collection (R.B.C.) at The University of Bath, Special Collections Archive: Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi, correspondence, February 1934 -January 1935, C64.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bowen and Joseph Svinth, correspondence, 1997-2004, F100-119, R.B.C., University of Bath.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Svinth, 'Special Section: Training in Japan pre-1960,' *Journal of Combative Sport* (2000) [online] [http://ejmas.com/jcs/jcsart\\_mayer1\\_0200.htm](http://ejmas.com/jcs/jcsart_mayer1_0200.htm) (accessed November 2015); Richard Bowen, *100 Years of Judo in Great Britain* (London: Indepenpress 2011).

western black belt in Japan, but, little was known about her life.<sup>4</sup> Who was this woman? What were her motivations? What were the contextual circumstances under which she became such an important, but forgotten, sporting pioneer, and why was she treated in such an unusual way by the Japanese establishment?

These research questions form the basis of this thesis. Through an analysis of the construction and destruction of a sporting role model, using a biographical framework, this work places Sarah Mayer's ground-breaking achievement into a wider social, political and cultural context.

A British actress, playwright and theatrical entrepreneur, Sarah Mayer holds an important, but hitherto neglected place in sporting history, particularly in relation to *budō* or martial ways. The thesis contends that an investigation into this important period in judo history through a case-study of Mayer, speaks not only to a much broader discourse on gendered inter-war sporting history, but the global political and cultural significance of sport within society as a whole. The work argues that Mayer's story places judo at the centre of the inter-war international politicisation of sport and leisure. The thesis will show that, as a highly visible example of Anglo-Japanese sporting relations, Mayer became briefly famous, before the wider political context made her Japanese sympathies problematic in Britain, and a degree of notoriety contributed to her subsequent ill health and early death.

Mayer's rise to brief sporting fame, and subsequent decline to obscurity are, to a large degree, mirrored by her increased social mobility and fall into destitution. In 1933, Mayer left behind her wealthy husband and the large Hampshire estate that they shared, for her trip to Japan. Less than eighteen months later, she became the first western woman to receive the award of *shōdan*, or first degree black belt, from the Butokukai, an increasingly militaristic and nationalistic Japanese institution, dedicated to the study of traditional and modern fighting

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<sup>4</sup> Examples where Mayer's achievements are discussed as a 'first' include, Mizoguchi Noriko, *性と柔: 女子柔道史から問う* [Gender and gentleness: A history of women's Judo]. Tokyo: 河出書房新社 2013) [in Japanese] p.134; Jean Williams, *A Contemporary History of Women's Sport, Part One 1850-1960* (New York: Routledge 2014) p.194; Adriana Brum, 'Keiko, Sarah e Rena: Três Ícones do Judô Mundial,' in *Proceedings of Congresso Brasileiro de História do Esporte, Lazer e Educação Física* (Londrina, PR, Brazil: State University of Londrina 2014) pp.6-13; Michel Brousse and Nicolas Messner, *Judo for the World* (Paris: International Judo Federation 2015) p.150.

techniques.<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps surprising that she would give up such a privileged lifestyle for a hard physical training regime, although her career as an actress may have prepared her for this, whilst also prompting her to seek an increased public profile. This work will consider her motivations in the lead up to her journey and her subsequent, somewhat surprising decision-making process, in relation to the political situation between Britain and Japan.

Though she began the trip an enthusiastic novice, Mayer's training in Japan concluded at the home of the art, the Kōdōkan in Tokyo, encouraged by Kanō, the founding father of judo. Mayer achieved her black belt award during an extension of the planned trip in 1935 and, exceptionally, was given access to elite male training and hitherto exclusively male spaces. Her extraordinary achievement was well-covered by the media of the day, and one of the key themes of this work is the politicisation of Mayer's position, both in Japan and at home in Britain through the press. Did Mayer set out to raise her profile for personal publicity or was she a willing or unwitting participant in a wider propaganda campaign? The thesis argues that the degree of fame that Mayer won was not entirely through her own agency, though this was clearly an important factor, but can to a larger extent be understood as shaped by the exploitation and manipulation of the political agenda of the Japanese establishment at that time.

Although sport history and women's history are now well developed as distinct aspects of academia, few specialists in either field today would be able to identify Mayer as a significant figure. It is, perhaps, remarkable that the life of such an important female sporting pioneer, and the events leading to her accomplishments between 1933 and 1935, have never before been investigated by an academic monograph or thesis, and this study aims to fill that lacuna.

The oversight may relate to the gendered discourse of sporting history more generally, and a lack of female role models being used as the subject of Ph.D. theses, combined with a relatively underdeveloped literature on judo and the martial arts. Beyond her life as an interesting and singular individual, Mayer's

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<sup>5</sup> Letters from Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi February 1934-January 1935. C.64, (R.B.C.), University of Bath.

case is also key to developing the extant academic literature, in terms of nuancing our perception of how sport came to be spread, internationally.

Through the impressive collection *The Cultural Bond* edited by J. A. Mangan,<sup>6</sup> and with authors such as Joseph Maguire, we have seen a focus on accounts of the European diffusion of sport across the colonies of each country's respective empire.<sup>7</sup> Mayer pioneered aspects of an Asian sport in its home country as an exceptional individual, and, to a lesser degree, aided the absorption of 'oriental' sporting culture within Britain. Although nearly thirty years of analysis has examined the agency of individuals and groups in terms of the diffusion of sporting rules and cultural practices, significantly, we have often seen the spread of ideas presented through a male lens, and discussions of masculinities. In 1996 for example, the authors of *European Heroes* concentrated entirely on male sporting stars, however, in the prologue, Holt and Mangan suggested that 'The field is wide open for historians of tomorrow' to take on the challenge of the female sporting biography.<sup>8</sup>

The thesis will show how Mayer's background as an actress and entrepreneur, and her social confidence as the wife of a wealthy, well connected man, gave her the self-assurance to perform physically challenging judo-related tasks, and the poise and self-confidence as a woman, to do so in relatively intimate surroundings with Japanese men. This is a new contribution to the academic literature, which has neglected the martial arts, and women's contribution to various self-defence disciplines almost entirely. In their comprehensive study of Japanese sports history, Guttmann and Thompson argue how 'Modernisation' was perceived as 'Westernisation', whilst presenting no evidence of female leading figures in Japan.<sup>9</sup> The study of Mayer counters the analysis of Guttmann and Thompson through a careful biographical investigation of how a Western woman was afforded the highest courtesies in the masculine world of judo in that country.

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<sup>6</sup> J. A. Mangan (ed), *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Examples of works by Maguire regarding the international diffusion of British sports include, Joseph Maguire, 'Assessing the Sociology of Sport: On Globalization and the Diffusion of Sport,' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50:4-5 (2015) pp.519-523; Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Holt, J.A. Mangan and Pierre Lanfranchi (eds), *European Heroes: Myth, Identity and Sport* (Abingdon: Frank Cass 1996) p.11.

<sup>9</sup> Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii 2001).

Due to the confines of space, whilst maintaining a biographical focus, the material provided on Mayer's theatrical background is primarily contextual. Chapter Two presents her early life and key influences, seeking to approach the research question of her identity, and considers the contextual circumstances of her childhood as a young actress, into adulthood, related to her encounters with feminism, leading in to her first marriage. Chapter Five shows Mayer returning to the stage back home in England, but unable, ultimately, to capitalise on the fame of her Japanese trip. While her life as an actress in Chapters Two and Five show, respectively, a rise to prominence, and fall from the public eye, the main body of the thesis, in Chapters Three and Four, concerns how the pinnacle of her fame as a sporting pioneer was constructed, and crucially, by whom, while in Japan.

Chapter Three is intended to give a detailed analysis of the early stages of Mayer's judo career in Britain and her social connections in London. Women's sport is becoming a more nuanced academic literature, and we have important biographical works such as Berno Bahro's article on Jewish athletes Lilli Henoch and Martha Jacob in inter-war Germany. However, very few academic treatments have shown how an individual sportswoman has become known as a famous expert in her field.<sup>10</sup> Few analysts may have previously understood the context of how an elite career in judo could be constructed, and by what conventions, in inter-war Japan.

Primarily seeking to answer the research questions related to Mayer's Japanese experience, Chapter Four will also argue that, whatever her personal enthusiasms, in terms of international relations in late 1933 and early 1934, Sarah Mayer chose an ill-advised time to travel to Japan. Naoko Shimazu points out that The Treaty of Versailles in 1919, designed to bring the First World War to a close and prevent future conflicts, had not recognised Japan's Imperial territorial rights, or, perhaps more importantly, the racial equality proposal submitted by Japan, whilst limiting the size of her Navy.<sup>11</sup> Ian Nish

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<sup>10</sup> Berno Bahro 'Lilli Henoch and Martha Jacob - two Jewish Athletes in Germany Before and After 1933' in Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen (eds), *Women in Sport History* (Abingdon: Routledge 2011) pp. 268-299.

<sup>11</sup> Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London and New York: Routledge 2004).



demonstrates how this led to increased nationalism throughout the 1920s.<sup>12</sup> Thomas Burkman agrees, arguing that rapidly after the beginning of Emperor Hirohito's sixty-three year reign in 1926, known as the Shōwa period, Japan moved into political totalitarianism, and extreme forms of nationalism, embodied by the Statist movement, particularly among right-wing Japanese intellectuals.<sup>13</sup>

Japan's expansionist policies increased during the 1930s with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the subsequent withdrawal from the League of Nations. Diplomatically isolated, and with the assassination of Prime Minister Tsuyoshi Inukai in May 1932, Japan increasingly became a dictatorship under Hirohito. Although the wider academic arguments about this phase of Japanese history are beyond the scope of this thesis, this literature nevertheless provides contextual background illustrating the controversiality of Mayer's visit during this tense period. The thesis argues that despite the deepening animosity between Japan and The West, Mayer was encouraged in her pursuit of judo, and used for publicity by, not only the judo establishment, but also the Japanese Government. These are complex processes, the thesis contends, because, as the writings of Kanō show, exponents of judo wished to see a greater internationalisation of their sport, whilst also emphasising its deep roots in traditional Japanese culture.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Chapters Three and Four explore the nuances of how Mayer might have come to represent complex and contradictory influences of modernity, and progressive gender politics, at the same time as being a western woman increasingly influenced by competing nationalist and militarist Japanese ideologies.

After Mayer's return home, and as the British economy slowly settled, pessimism across the country gave way to optimism, although, as Drabik notes, the founding of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) by Oswald Mosley in 1932 was an ominous accompaniment to the more socialist views being embraced by

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<sup>12</sup> I. H. Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1908–23* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914–1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Jigorō Kanō, 'Jiudo [sic] is the Secret of Japan's Forward March' *The Aberdeen Press and Journal* 8 January 1934 p.6; Naoki Murata (ed) and Nancy H. Ross (trans), *Mind over Muscle: Writings from the Founder of Judo, Jigorō Kano* (Tokyo, New York and London: Kodansha International 2005) p.71.

the country following the economic difficulties.<sup>15</sup> Pugh argues that the violence exhibited at the Olympia rally in 1934 created a turning point in the British public consciousness of fascism and its related political ideals.<sup>16</sup> This thesis demonstrates that this introduction of organised fascism, and the public backlash, impacted on Mayer's reception in the British press owing to her connections with Japan, and that, most damagingly of all, Mayer remained unrepentant or unaware of how to regain her reputation.

In 1935 as Mayer faced divorce, she joined a group of Japanese athletes visiting Berlin in the period leading to the Olympic Games held by Nazi-run Germany. The party were invited to meet the Fuhrer, and once again, Mayer was witness to sport being used for the political and diplomatic aims of another fascist government. In the British press, *The Daily Express* along with some other prominent newspapers, took a right-wing stance. At the opening ceremony of the Games in Berlin in August 1936, the British Team neglected to gratify the organisers with a Nazi salute, merely giving a nod in the direction of the Führer, a gesture of dissent which, as Gardiner argues, disappointed *The Express*, who thought it churlish.<sup>17</sup> It is this newspaper group which provides the thesis with a compelling piece of evidence, investigated in Chapter Five, of Mayer's Japanophile consciousness just three years later, and invites the question of her political and national loyalty.

Japan's invasion of China in 1937 had further strained anti-Japanese feeling in Britain at a time when Mayer was seeking to re-establish her career in the theatre. Back home, as Mayer continued to struggle to find financial security into the 1940s, international relations between Japan, and the allied forces of the United States, Great Britain and The Netherlands grew increasingly hostile. As Chapter Five will assess, the legacy of Mayer's Japanese trip may well have contributed to her ongoing personal and professional difficulties. However, this chapter will also demonstrate Mayer's final contribution as a role model, for women's self-defence in Britain, through her knowledge of the martial arts,

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<sup>15</sup> Jakub Drabik, 'British Union of Fascists,' *Contemporary British History* 30:1 (2016) pp.1-19, DOI: 10.1080/13619462.2015.1041279.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Pugh, 'The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate,' *The Historical Journal* 41:2 (June 1998) pp.529-542.

<sup>17</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press 2010) p.430; Trevor Wignall, 'Eyes Right' *Daily Express* 3 August 1936 p.9.

whilst considering the causes of the demise in the public consciousness of someone who briefly became a female sporting hero.

The bibliography for this thesis highlights the full range of archival holdings which I have used to research the work and have accessed, either in person or remotely, on both a domestic and international scale. Initially, my research focussed on gathering biographical material. Important archival sources in the UK have been the National Archives and the General Register Office, from where much of the biographical detail has been sourced. The British Library, from where I have accessed contemporary international newspapers and much of the background information necessary for this work, have kindly featured my project as a case study on their website.<sup>18</sup> The Richard Bowen Collection at the University of Bath, where I was filmed to promote my project and the archive, has been an invaluable resource for British judo history, especially the Budokwai records, and for original papers relating to Sarah Mayer herself.<sup>19</sup> I am also indebted to many local and private collections, including the Mayer family's archive. Internationally, the Kōdōkan Museum and Archive in Tokyo has been vital for my understanding of Mayer's time in Japan, and for Japanese judo history, and the staff at this and many other archives around the world have been incredibly helpful, assisting me to search out relevant information which has allowed me to analyse the contribution Sarah Mayer has made to judo history.

This thesis is the culmination of ten years of academic research and throughout that period I have developed and refined my view of Mayer across a series of publications and outputs. In 2009, I collaborated on a project to find initial background and basic biographical information on Mayer for an academic poster presentation and paper.<sup>20</sup> This was the first work on Mayer after Bowen and Svinth's original interest. Latterly, presentations at international conferences, particularly at the International Budo Conference in Osaka in

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<sup>18</sup> British Library Case Studies, Amanda Callan-Spenn [online] <https://www.bl.uk/case-studies/amanda-callan-spenn> (accessed June 2018).

<sup>19</sup> University of Bath Archives, Cabinet of Curiosities [online] The University of Bath <http://www.bath.ac.uk/library/cabinet-of-curiosities/#!/story/12> (accessed June 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Mike Callan and Amanda Spenn, 'A Fashionable Judo Girl: Sarah W. B. Mayer 1896-1957,' in D. Scardone (ed), *Proceedings of the 6th International Science of Judo Symposium*, (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Erasmus University 2009) p.50.

2017, helped me to develop my awareness of both the Japanese political context and Sarah's reputation in contemporary Japanese sports history.<sup>21</sup> In 2018 I presented a paper at The Institute of Historical Research, as part of the Sport and Leisure History seminars, where I investigated the political aspects of Mayer's judo and journalistic career through the media, and I began to see her as both agent of her own identity and a pawn in a large political struggle, and this forms the basis of thinking for chapter four of this work.<sup>22</sup> Extending and revisiting this, in 2019 I presented at the British Society of Sports Historians annual conference, winning the Richard Cox postgraduate prize for an analysis of the photographs and their political context.<sup>23</sup> I have also written a collaborative article which was published in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, where myself and the other authors considered the development of judo in the early twentieth century through three British women including Sarah Mayer, helping me to consider Mayer's place among other important British female *jūdoka*.<sup>24</sup>

I have been commissioned by *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* to write a short biography of Mayer<sup>25</sup> and by Routledge to write a chapter on the history of women in judo, as part of a new series on *Women, Sport and Physical Activity*, edited by Professor Elizabeth Pike, as yet unpublished. This will be the first chapter-length academic collective biography in the English language of female judo pioneers and the global progression of women in judo to date. The resultant research informs this thesis with comparisons between Mayer and other significant female figures in judo on the global stage. The key themes and research questions arising out of the gaps in the knowledge that much of this

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<sup>21</sup> Amanda Spenn, 'Sarah Mayer: A Judo Journey,' *Proceedings of the 2017 International Budo Conference, Osaka, Japan* (Tokyo: Japanese Academy of Budo 2018) p.178; Mike Callan and Amanda Spenn 'Sarah Mayer and the Kōdōkan; Early European Women's judo in Japan,' in H. Sertic, S. Corak, and I. Segedi (eds), *Proceedings of the 3rd European Science of Judo Research Symposium & 2nd Scientific and Professional Conference on Judo: Applicable Research in Judo* (Porec, Croatia: University of Zagreb 2016) pp.12-15.

<sup>22</sup> Amanda Callan-Spenn, 'Sarah Mayer, An Englishwoman in Japan: Judo as Propaganda in the 1930s,' (paper presented at The Institute for Historical Research, London, 15 October 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Amanda Callan-Spenn, 'It is Quite Impossible to Adequately Conceal Oneself in a Bucket,' (paper presented at the 2019 BSSH Conference, Liverpool).

<sup>24</sup> Mike Callan, Conor Heffernan and Amanda Spenn, 'Women's Jūjutsu and Judo in the Early Twentieth Century,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 35:6 (2018) pp.530-553.

<sup>25</sup> Amanda Callan-Spenn, 'Mayer [née Tapping], Sarah Winifred Benedict (1896-1957),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019).

preliminary, shorter work has identified have been incorporated into this thesis and developed by an in-depth analysis of Sarah Mayer and her contemporaries.

Beyond my own work, the secondary literature regarding Sarah Mayer, as part of a body of upper middle-class women in inter-war Britain drawn to Eastern culture is extremely limited. When I first came across her letters and tried to find more about Mayer in the popular history of the sport, there was very little to read beyond a mention of the letters, and her achievement as a 'first' black belt. The study of the history of women in judo in the English language academic literature is also sparse. Specifically, there have been very few biographical works produced of British *jūdōka*. A check through Cox's comprehensive bibliographic collection of sports biographies to the year 2000, revealed just two.<sup>26</sup> These are works by Neil Adams M.B.E., and Karen Briggs M.B.E., both of which are autobiographies of players active through the late twentieth century. Hugh Cortazzi's *Biographical Portraits*, tracing important characters in Anglo-Japanese relations, includes two short works on contemporaries of Mayer, her *sensei* Gunji Koizumi, and Trevor Pryce Leggett.<sup>27</sup> To address a virtually neglected subject within the extant literature therefore, this work, aims to be the first in-depth biographical thesis dedicated to an important early British female *jūdōka* in inter-war Britain, at an important juncture in Anglo-Japanese relations.

## 1.1 Gender and Sports History

This thesis presents Sarah Mayer as a key figure for future works in the field of gendered sports history. The gendered experiences of sport have been assessed by specialists in both early modern and modern histories. For instance, Brailsford argues that, in Britain, female involvement in sport was evident as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, with 'women's smock races', and 'stoolball', an early form of cricket.<sup>28</sup> Brailsford also points out that female participation has traditionally been politicised and controversial, referencing Richard Mulcaster, an advocator of education for girls, from his

<sup>26</sup> Richard William Cox, *British Sport - a Bibliography to 2000: Volume 3: Biographical Studies of British Sportsmen, Women and Animals* (London and New York: Routledge 2013) pp.25 and 38.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Bowen, 'Koizumi Gunji, 1885-1965: Judo Master' and Anthony Dunne and Richard Bowen, 'Trevor Pryce Leggett, 1914-2000' in Hugh Cortazzi (ed), *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Volume IV* (London: Routledge 2002) pp.312-322 and 323-333.

<sup>28</sup> Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1969).

*Positions* of 1581, who argued that girls were less biologically prepared for education, and physical activity, than boys.<sup>29</sup>

The argument of female biological inferiority compared with male virility has been a recurring theme into the modern period. From a sociological standpoint, Eric Dunning notes that modern sport 'emerged as a male preserve' accounting for 'the strength of male resistance to attempts by females to enter it.' However, he does argue that this has been altering, describing the change as 'civilizing transformation.'<sup>30</sup> Richard Holt describes the involvement of women in British sport between the late eighteenth and the twentieth century as insignificant, and mainly confined to spectatorial roles, or supporting activities such as catering and laundry, although he does point to an interest in tennis and golf.<sup>31</sup> Tranter agrees, arguing that during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, women's participation was perhaps negligible owing to the 'double burden' of working inside and outside the home.<sup>32</sup>

But this consensus has been increasingly contested by key texts which focus mainly, or solely, on women and sport. Though Guttman's 1991 survey of *Women's Sports* is of an introductory nature, usefully for this thesis he approaches the topic from an international perspective and takes the story back to the Roman period, including the combative arts, and female gladiators who 'descended into the arena', giving a broad historical context for women fighting as a 'sport'.<sup>33</sup> His description of pugilistic endeavours between women in America in the later part of the nineteenth century as more titillating display than boxing match has also been valuable. Guttman's work has brought a consideration of the varied audiences, with a wide range of motivations, into the analysis of how Sarah Mayer may have been perceived while participating physically in contact sports against mainly male opponents in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brailsford, *Sport and Society* p.234.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Dunning, *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilisation* (London and New York: Routledge 1999) p.237.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989) pp.347 and 130.

<sup>32</sup> Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) pp.78-93.

<sup>33</sup> Allen Guttman, *Women's Sports: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press 1991) p.39.

<sup>34</sup> Guttman, *Women's Sports* p.101.

In terms of physical fitness being allied to a feminist perspective, a topic which is approached in Chapter Two of this thesis, the historiography has developed with dedicated monographs since the mid-1980s in Britain. Writers like Sheila Fletcher have argued that in the late nineteenth century physical activity was an important part of women's emancipation, a theme at the heart of this work, although Mayer was not one of the increasing number of women taking part in further and higher education.<sup>35</sup> She did nevertheless have access to debates about women's and universal suffrage through her professional and social circle. In Jennifer Hargreaves' 1994 historical and sociological survey *Sporting Females*, she illustrated that, into the twentieth century, a growing number of women took to a range of athletic events and 'atypical' sports as part of their commitment to feminist ideals.<sup>36</sup> Twenty years after this foundational text was published, Osborne and Skillen pointed to the increasing discourse on the history of women in sport.<sup>37</sup> This development has been slow though, given that sport was seen as a male preserve and has often been neglected by scholars of gender and women's history. Works by authors such as Jean Williams, and Raf Nicholson, which have contributed to debates on women in so-called male sports, have often focussed on team sports rather than individual disciplines.<sup>38</sup> In terms of combative arts, Irene Gammel has shown with boxing, how women in the early twentieth century used 'their corporeal and textual self-inscriptions' to 'stage their own exclusion from the sport and the realm of male agency or power.'<sup>39</sup> However, in comparison to studies of women's boxing, the martial arts has been a particularly underdeveloped area, as has the inter-war period.

In addition to the sporting historiography, this work also speaks to the global movement of British women, and 'orientalism' in that era, informing patterns of women's work and leisure discussed by authors such as Gardiner and Horn.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880-1980* (London: The Athlone Press 1984).

<sup>36</sup> Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge 1994).

<sup>37</sup> Carole A. Osborne and Fiona Skillen, 'Forum: Women in Sport,' *Women's History Review* 24:5 (2015) pp.655-661.

<sup>38</sup> For example see, Williams, *Contemporary History*; Rafaelle Nicholson, "'Our own paper": Evaluating the Impact of Women's Cricket Magazine, 1930-1967,' *Women's History Review* 24:5 (2015) pp.681-699, DOI:10.1080/09612025.2015.1028209.

<sup>39</sup> Irene Gammel, 'Lacing Up the Gloves,' *Cultural and Social History* 9:3 (2012) pp.369-390.

<sup>40</sup> Gardiner, *The Thirties*; Pamela Horn, *Women in the 1920s* (Stroud: Amberley 2010).

Gardiner indicates that 'there was considerable prejudice against women workers' through the 1930s, but describes how 'beautiful, daring and sometimes reckless women' of the wealthier classes undertook adventurous new sports.<sup>41</sup> Pugh argues that British society enjoyed 'relative stability ... during the prolonged depression of the inter-war period'.<sup>42</sup> But Denman and McDonald show that the opening years of the 1920s, saw more than two million unemployed men and women, with an average across the decade of over one million.<sup>43</sup> Mayer's experience in this period reflected both. As a working actress and producer these figures would have impacted directly both on her employability, and as an employer.

Mayer's self-reliance is an important theme within this work. There is a general consensus that the First World War had a profound effect on women's expectations.<sup>44</sup> Fell describes how 'experiences ... of post-war women (and men) simultaneously emphasised new opportunities, heightened anxieties and grievous losses'.<sup>45</sup> Importantly, Holloway notes the divisions between priorities within the inter-war women's movement, of patriotism and support of the country which had hitherto been the enemy, and loyalty to the cause of female enfranchisement.<sup>46</sup> Horn shows that the female labour force had increased by over 25% with 4.93 million employed before the war becoming 6.19 million in July 1918.<sup>47</sup> With hopeful anticipation for an egalitarian Britain and the first Labour Prime Minister in 1924, albeit with a minority government, the struggle to achieve women's suffrage on equal terms finally became an attainable objective. By 1928, under Baldwin's Conservative Government, with full enfranchisement in place, many young women, including Mayer, who at that time was in her early thirties, must have gained a greater confidence in their

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<sup>41</sup> Gardiner, *The Thirties* pp.40 and 694.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Vintage Books 2009) p.viii; also see Roger Lloyd-Jones and Merv Lewis, *British Industrial Capitalism since the Industrial Revolution* (London and New York: Routledge 1998) p.131.

<sup>43</sup> James Denman and Paul McDonald, *Unemployment Statistics from 1881 to the Present Day* (Special Feature prepared by the Government Statistical Service 1996).

<sup>44</sup> See, Alison S. Fell, *Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018) p.13; Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840* (London and New York: Routledge 2005) p.177; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-war Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993) pp.114-139.

<sup>45</sup> Fell, *Women as Veterans* p.3.

<sup>46</sup> Holloway, *Women and Work* p.177.

<sup>47</sup> Horn, *Women in the 1920s* p.14.



ability to compete within a patriarchal society, and the thesis argues that this may have contributed to the motivation for her trip.

Through the 1920s and 1930s, as both a working actress and a socialite wife, Mayer vacillated between earning a basic living and being part of an entitled elite. Williams notes the conflicting accessibility to entertainments or hobbies between the privileged and the working-class.<sup>48</sup> Horn concurs:

‘there [was] an immense difference between the leisure pursuits of affluent wives and daughters in fashionable Mayfair or in prosperous suburbia and their slum dwelling counterparts in the centre of town.’<sup>49</sup>

The weekly wait at the pub for some women, for market stall holders to sell off their wares cheaply at the end of the day, described by Horn, contrasts sharply with Rosenbaum and Taylor’s seemingly idealised depiction of lives within the smart sets of the time, albeit fraught with their own difficulties.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of the extensive wider literature on the inter-war period, as sociologist Janine van Someren states, there is a lack of consideration towards women and sport at that time.<sup>51</sup> Although recent work by Fiona Skillen has focussed on inter-war modernity, as more women moved into a greater range of sports, she does not include the martial arts to any great degree.<sup>52</sup> Vertinsky notes that The Women’s League of Health and Beauty was founded in Britain in 1930, by Mary Bagot Stack, and links the organisation of physical movement aesthetics with nationalist ideology.<sup>53</sup> Doughan and Gordon agree, noting that the aim of the league initially was ‘Racial Health’, with ‘Leading to Peace’ added in 1936.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> A. Susan Williams, *Ladies of Influence: Women of the Elite in Inter-war Britain* (London: Penguin 2001) pp.10-11.

<sup>49</sup> Horn, *Women in the 1920s* pp.185-186.

<sup>50</sup> Stanford Patrick Rosenbaum (ed), *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs and Commentary* Revised Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc. 1995); D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918-1940* (London: Vintage 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Janine van Someren, ‘Women’s Sporting Lives’ (Thesis for Ph.D., University of Southampton, 2010) p.2.

<sup>52</sup> Fiona Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Vertinsky, ‘Building the Body Beautiful’ in ‘The Women’s League of Health and Beauty: Yoga and Female Agency in 1930s Britain,’ *Rethinking History* 16:4 (2012) pp.517-542.

<sup>54</sup> David Doughan and Peter Gordon, *Women, Clubs and Associations in Britain* (London and New York: Routledge 2006) p.83.

Gardiner describes how Bagot Stack strove for 'harmony... between beauty and peace'.<sup>55</sup>

Ideas allying defence and physical preparedness were widespread during Mayer's formative years of training in judo at the Budokwai in London, and so judo cannot be overlooked in historical analyses.<sup>56</sup> Lord Sempill (later known to be divulging military secrets to the Japanese), when introducing a televised judo display in 1938 by members of the Budokwai at Alexandra Palace, talked of the importance of *jūjutsu* to the National Fitness Campaign.<sup>57</sup> In January 1935, the year that Mayer received her black belt, British newspapers ran a piece saying that Japanese women were practicing the art of *jūjutsu* from an early age, implying that British women should do the same:

'Japanese women consider that there is neither beauty nor grace in weakness. Nor do they believe that there is any excuse for the ordinary woman to be anything but strong and cheerful.'<sup>58</sup>

Although this thesis questions how widespread women's judo was in Japan at this time, the encouragement of women to take up *jūjutsu* through the media is an important aspect of the work.

The evidence shows that Mayer, whilst training at the Budokwai, was likely to be influenced by this drive for a more athletic population. The thesis demonstrates that there was a keen interest in martial arts by women in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s, and participation, although not on the scale of male inclusion, was significant. Here, judo provides a key example to the wider literature on gender and sport, showing that the policing of binary gender boundaries may not have been as homogenous as has been suggested.

Through the case-study of Sarah Mayer, this work explores the transnational spread of modernity through sport and has benefitted from the excellent work by Skillen on the inter-war period. She argues that women's involvement in sport was 'symptomatic' of the modernity of the female body: 'The way it was

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<sup>55</sup> Gardiner, *The Thirties* p.522.

<sup>56</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London: Jonathan Cape 2000); Gardiner, *The Thirties*.

<sup>57</sup> 'Lord Sempill' *Aberdeen Journal* 23 February 1938 p.6.

<sup>58</sup> For example: 'Japanese Women and Jiu-Jitsu' *Northern Whig* 11 January 1935 p.10; 'Japanese Women and Jiu-Jitsu' *Nottingham Evening Post* 15 January 1935 p.4.

dressed, how its hair was styled and, even its shape were all intrinsic symbols of a woman's conformity to modernity and its associated ideals'.<sup>59</sup> Sarah Mayer was both agent and exemplar of the global Modern Girl phenomena, as popular in Japan as it was in Britain. The *Modan Gāru* or *Moga* in Japan, unsurprisingly held modernity as a progressive form of emancipation for women; an escape from the traditional values and conventions which stifled women's lives outside of the home environment, although Mackie also relates it to a transnational context, looking at 'ethnicity and racialisation under conditions of colonial modernity'.<sup>60</sup> Sato describes how the image of the *Moga* 'mirrored a style that was current throughout the world', and considers that the style 'entered Japan from Europe via the United States'.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, Weinbaum et al consider the Modern Girl to be a concurrent emerging theme across the world, therefore removing the western influence.<sup>62</sup> However, this work has found that in Japan it was closely tied to western styles of clothing and perceived freedom of choice. The relation to sports was also evident, as Koishihara presents, with young women's magazines using sporting images, and featuring western female sports stars.<sup>63</sup> Sarah Mayer's athleticism and western attitudes, along with her interest in judo and its high moral values, fitted the model perfectly for the commercialism of these images. This thesis considers whether it was Mayer's own 'modernity' and image which influenced the politicised use of her by the establishment, and the Japanese press to engage with and publicise her story.

Judo, often considered to be a traditional form of the Japanese fighting arts, was a modern educational concept, bringing together ancient techniques and placing them in conjunction with moral pedagogies. As Tony Mason points out, 'Sport is not a separate activity pursued for its own sake but closely bound up

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<sup>59</sup> Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity in Inter-war Britain* p.227.

<sup>60</sup> Vera Mackie, "'The Moga' as Racialised Category in 1920s and 1930s Japan,' in Leigh Boucher et al (eds), *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity* (Melbourne, Vic.: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007) pp.212-224.

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media and Women in Inter-war Japan* (London: Duke University Press 2003) p.53.

<sup>62</sup> Alys Eve Weinbaum et al (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization* (London: Duke University Press 2008).

<sup>63</sup> Koishihara Miho, 'A Study on Representations and Gender Norms of "Sporting Girls" in a Girls' Magazine of the 1920s and 1930s.' *スポーツとジェンダー研究 Sport and Gender Studies*. 12 2014: pp.4-18 [in Japanese].

with the hierarchy, ritual and symbols of the wider social life'.<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey Hill argues that 'sporting activities' are 'cultural agencies with *ideological* significance', a description which resonates strongly when considering judo history.<sup>65</sup> Jigorō Kanō is quoted as having said, 'judo in reality is not a mere sport or game. I regard it as a principle of life, art and science. In fact, it is a means for personal cultural attainment'.<sup>66</sup> This 'modern' concept of judo held a commercial attraction, and for women, like Mayer, who may have perceived themselves as unconventional, held more than an athletic appeal.

Mayer's unconventionality is perhaps another reason why she has not, hitherto, featured prominently in sporting histories. Single women, divorcees, and women who did not become mothers are often neglected by the existing historiography, which can homogenise female experiences based on an assumption that women married for life and became mothers. In *Managing the Body*, Zweiniger-Bargielowska has stated that, 'The modern woman of the inter-war years was the race mother whose civic duty to manage her body for the well-being of the nation paralleled men's obligation to become healthy and fit workers and soldiers'.<sup>67</sup> This was an international issue. Jensen argues that a similar drive for strength among the populace had been developing in the Weimar Republic.<sup>68</sup> Here too the female body was of concern, with modernity encompassing physical preparedness and fashions for boxing, tennis and athletics. But Mayer, although self-consciously modern in her tastes and outlook, did not have children, and was twice divorced, spending considerable periods of her life financially self-reliant, so discussions about the compelling ideologies of being 'mother to the race' would appear to exclude such women.

The thesis shows that Mayer began the 1920s as a self-sufficient working woman with a questionable reputation, but, through her second marriage,

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<sup>64</sup> Tony Mason (ed), *Sport in Britain: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) p.344.

<sup>65</sup> Jeffrey Hill, *Sport in History: An Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011) p.6.

<sup>66</sup> Jigorō Kanō quoted in Gunji Koizumi, 'Judo and the Olympic Games,' *Judo: Budokwai Quarterly Bulletin* 3:1 (April 1947) pp.7–8.

<sup>67</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010) p.278.

<sup>68</sup> Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender and German Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013).

became increasingly wealthy and socially accepted as the decade progressed. Pugh refers to the 'atmosphere of hedonism and decadence' which prevailed amongst 'smart metropolitan society'.<sup>69</sup> However, Fowler argues that this was restricted to a limited group of 'effete upper-class youths, down from Oxford and labelled by the press at the time as the "Bright Young Things"'.<sup>70</sup> Groups of artistic likeminded individuals, such as The Bloomsbury Group began to appear.<sup>71</sup> Their members often came from families of fading aristocracy or country house owners, who, as Horn shows, were struggling to keep the entirety of their estates through the years of the depression era.<sup>72</sup>

The country house weekend became an almost obligatory event within that set, and although she had begun her life as a working girl from a working-class family, Mayer's influences leading to her trip were affected by this social elite. She had married twice, in 1919 and 1924. Both husbands came from affluent households, putting her firmly in that segment of the population who could enjoy certain privileges of status and behaviour. Mayer was an aspirational social climber who, by the age of twenty-two, had married into a family which, if not aristocratic, could certainly be described as *haute monde*. Although this marriage was to end in disaster, her second marriage placed her even higher in the social hierarchy, and she and her new husband indulged their friends and family with weekend retreats to their small country estate. It is photographs of these events which have helped this thesis to show Mayer on the periphery of these elite social sets.

Class and social mobility are key themes of this thesis, and Hargreaves points to the affluent nature of female adventure sports pioneers, travelling to exotic places and indulging in 'elite sports' such as mountaineering, in the inter-war period, although she does not include the Japanese martial arts among them.<sup>73</sup> Williams has contended that feminists often engaged in 'modern' sporting activities, including the martial arts. In particular, she points out that women of the suffrage movement used Japanese martial arts for self-defence, as well as

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<sup>69</sup> Pugh, *We Danced All Night* p.344.

<sup>70</sup> David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920-c.1970* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) p.67.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *Bright Young People*; Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group*.

<sup>72</sup> Pamela Horn, *Country House Society* (Stroud: Amberley 2015) pp.76-92.

<sup>73</sup> Hargreaves, *Sporting Females* p.118.

group physical activity, and we can trace a direct linkage from these women to Mayer's experience, training in London in the 1920s and 1930s with Yukio Tani, a former performer on the music hall stage.<sup>74</sup>

The links between combat sports and theatre are considered by Budd as tools for the promotion of masculinity, related to Dunning's consideration of sport as a component of such.<sup>75</sup> But the corresponding female perspective as exemplified by authors such as Bennett and Looser, both of whom concentrate on the pre-war era,<sup>76</sup> and also by Gems and Pfister in their work on female boxers, shows women challenging 'gender boundaries and the assumption of women as the "weaker sex"'.<sup>77</sup> In their important work showing the under-represented females of the late nineteenth-century American boxing ring, Gems and Pfister use 'biographical sketches' and state that their 'examination intends to ascertain the early development of women's boxing and its affinity with vaudeville, and identify some of the participants and analyse their motivations.'<sup>78</sup> Their work has been hugely useful for this thesis. When considering a female pioneer in the fighting arts such as Mayer, the work by Gems and Pfister demonstrates that she was not alone as a member of the theatrical profession taking to the ring, or in this case the mat, and the aims of their work inform one of the key objectives of this thesis, to analyse Mayer's motivations using a biographical context.

In other work by Gems, he argues that (American) female athletes had pushed not only geographical boundaries, but 'social, psychological and physiological frontiers' in the burgeoning realm of sports tourism.<sup>79</sup> Certainly, in Mayer's case, there is an intersection of feminist principles and being wealthy enough to travel overseas, and here the thesis points to the division of socio-economic groups

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<sup>74</sup> Williams, *Contemporary History* p.84.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire* (New York: New York University Press 1997) p.79; Eric Dunning, 'Sport as a Male Preserve,' in Eric Dunning and Norbert Elias (eds), *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackford 1986) pp.242-259.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Bennett, 'Japanese Martial Arts in Early Twentieth-Century New Zealand: A Story of Multipronged Cultural Migration,' (Paper presented at International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, Overseas Conference, Otago 2016); Diana Looser, 'Radical Bodies and Dangerous Ladies: Martial Arts and Women's Performance 1900-1918,' *Theatre Research International* 36:1 pp.3-19.

<sup>77</sup> Gerald Gems and Gertrud Pfister, 'Women Boxers: Actresses to Athletes,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 31:15 (2014) pp.1909-1924.

<sup>78</sup> Gems and Pfister, 'Women Boxers' p.1909.

<sup>79</sup> Gerald R. Gems, 'Women and the Advent of American Sport Tourism: The Feminine Invasion of Male Space,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34:14 (2017) pp.1468-1482.

and their abilities to engage in leisure and politics. As Hill points out, in the early twentieth century, ‘constraints of both social class and gender ... shaped the experience of these women’.<sup>80</sup> This work will show how Mayer’s changing social position created an opportunity to become involved in an adventurous sport, on an extended and expensive trip. Therefore, the thesis demonstrates how social mobility, both upwards and downwards, in addition to ethnicity and wealth, could affect gendered experiences in sport, nuancing the existing historiography.

## 1.2 Judo History, and British Judo History

This thesis demonstrates the importance of the inclusion of judo in the British inter-war sporting historiography. Michel Brousse has written much on the history of judo, including, with Messner, the monograph, *Judo for the World* for the International Judo Federation.<sup>81</sup> Within this text Brousse studies the history of the art, and mentions Mayer with reference to her letters.<sup>82</sup> Although less academic in style, Stevens’ biographical work on Kanō and his students, as part of the English language historiography, is a useful text for historians, and holds a comprehensive section on the female students of Kanō. Stevens mentions Mayer as one of Kanō’s Western students, also using her letters as a source, although he states that she was the first Western female Kōdōkan *shōdan*, or black belt, and this research argues that it was a Butokukai *shōdan*, not Kōdōkan, and the relevance of this is discussed in Chapter Four of this work.<sup>83</sup>

So, we can see that, alongside the works by Bowen and Svinth, there is a significant interest in Mayer in the current judo historiography, but few have moved beyond a simple reading of her letters to discover the context within which she trained and operated both in Britain and Japan. Mayer’s letters tell us a little about the circumstances within which she found herself in Japan, and some of the important judo characters with whom she interacted, but nothing about the circumstances under which she came to be there. There is no

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<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave 2002) p.9.

<sup>81</sup> Michel Brousse and David Matsumoto, *Judo in the U.S.* (Berkeley California: North Atlantic Books 2003); Brousse and Messner, *Judo for the World*.

<sup>82</sup> Brousse and Messner, *Judo for the World* p.158.

<sup>83</sup> John Stevens, *The Way of Judo: Jigoro Kano and his Students* (Boston and London: Shambala Publications Inc. 2013).

detailed analysis within the existing historiography, and without this, and a comprehensive biographical study, the information they provide is limited.

Bennett's 2009 translation of the 1964 biography of Kanō provides excellent data in terms of timelines etc., helping this work to analyse the evidence with relation to Mayer's involvement in judo in Japan.<sup>84</sup> Bennett's work also holds a section on the beginnings of participation in judo by women in Japan, going some way towards uncovering Kanō's rising interest in such. Along with translations of Kanō's lectures and teachings, edited by Kōdōkan historian Naoki Murata, this provides a basis for the analysis of Kanō's engagement with Mayer, and his political, or otherwise, interest in her judo ambition, in response to the question regarding the motivations of the Japanese judo establishment in their treatment of Mayer.<sup>85</sup>

The female historical perspective has more recently been approached by Mizoguchi (although little of her work is accessible in English), who also mentions Mayer, and who challenges the hegemonic status of the Kōdōkan in women's judo, a case supported by Miarka et al in their work 'Reinterpreting the history of women's judo in Japan'.<sup>86</sup> These works provide useful context for this thesis with regard to Mayer's overall experience as a female *jūdoka* in Japan, and the differentiation between her Butokukai and Kōdōkan ranking.

Keiko Fukuda who became the highest ranked female in the history of Kōdōkan judo, asked the question in 1973, 'should women's judo be considered the same as men's judo?' This parallels Williams' introductory question of 'Women and Sport or Women's Sport?' in her wider historical exploration.<sup>87</sup> In Fukuda's own reply she referred to the difference in 'physical structure' between the sexes. Although in the twenty-first century we might think of this as outdated, the question continues to be mooted. In 2011, Miarka et al considered 'whether there is a special practice as "women's judo" or whether there is just judo, which

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<sup>84</sup> Alex Bennett (ed and trans), *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan: An Innovative Response to Modernisation* (Tokyo: Kōdōkan Judo Institute 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p. 132; Murata, *Mind over Muscle*.

<sup>86</sup> Mizoguchi, 性と柔: 女子柔道史から問う [*Gender and gentleness: A history of women's Judo*] p.134; Bianca Miarka, Juliana Bastos Marques and Emerson Franchini, 'Reinterpreting the History of Women's Judo in Japan,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28:7 (2011) pp.1016-1029.

<sup>87</sup> Keiko Fukuda, *Born for the Mat* (San Francisco: For the Author 1973) p.10; Williams, *Contemporary History* p.1.



women also happen to practice [sic]?<sup>88</sup> An analysis of Mayer's experiences as one of the first women to train with men in Japan, gives an important historical perspective to this question.

Although employing a contemporary standpoint, Birrell and Richter make the important distinction between women from the feminist community participating in sport, and women applying feminist principles to their sport.<sup>89</sup> Mayer's inclusion into the traditionally male enclaves of judo relates to femininity within so-called male sports. This thesis looks at Mayer's stance within a male world and her refusal to train with women in Japan, therefore contributing to this debate surrounding the historical intersection between feminine practice and sport.

In British minds at the turn of the century, *jūjutsu* and judo were not differentiated. The term *jūjutsu* was more commonly known historically as a way to describe the Japanese wrestling arts. In 1906, Yukio Tani and Taro Miyake, the foremost performers of the art in the British psyche, produced a manual called *The Game of Ju-jitsu*, setting out basic techniques.<sup>90</sup> Uchida and Murata argue that the techniques included in this book closely mirrored those of Kōdōkan judo at that time.<sup>91</sup>

The rise in popularity of *jūjutsu* for women in Britain in the early twentieth century, has been shown by Godfrey to have been borne out of political civil disobedience.<sup>92</sup> This thesis shows Mayer as rooted in the campaign for women's suffrage through her family and theatrical connections. By 1910, when Mayer was a young teenager, the women's suffrage movement was at the peak of its confrontational aggression, and Leslie Hill argues that militant suffragettes needed self-defence techniques to protect themselves, not only from the police,

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<sup>88</sup> Miarka, Marques and Franchini, 'Reinterpreting,' pp. 1016-1029.

<sup>89</sup> Susan Birrell and Diana M. Richter, 'Is a Diamond Forever?' in S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (eds), *Women, Sport and Culture* (Leeds: Human Kinetics, 1994) p. 221.

<sup>90</sup> Taro Miyake and Yukio Tani, *The Game of Ju-jitsu* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney 1906).

<sup>91</sup> Kenji Uchida and Naoki Murata, 'A Comparison of Judo Technique Theory in the Monthly Kōdōkan Publication "Kokushi" and Y. Tani's "The Game of Ju-jitsu",' *Research Journal of Budo* 46, Supplement (2013-2014) p.97.

<sup>92</sup> Emelyne Godfrey, *Femininity, Crime and Self Defence in Victorian Literature and Society*, (Palgrave Macmillan 2012); Emelyne Godfrey, 'The Rise of the Jujitsu-Suffragettes: Martial Arts in Fin-de-Siècle Great Britain,' (paper presented at Asia House for the Bagri Foundation, 19 May 2016).

but mobs of anti-suffrage campaigners.<sup>93</sup> Harold L. Smith points out that violence could be extreme, as tensions between the political divides deepened.<sup>94</sup> In 1913, Sylvia Pankhurst was quoted in the *New York Times*: ‘We have not yet made ourselves a match for the police, and we have got to do it. The police know jiu-jitsu. I advise you to learn jiu-jitsu. Women should practice [sic] it as well as men.’<sup>95</sup>

A bodyguard was formed of women, as Crawford explains, trained in *jūjutsu* by Edith Garrud.<sup>96</sup> Godfrey describes how these protectors accompanied the Pankhursts and other prominent leaders of the W.S.P.U. to meetings or marches, arguing that Garrud ‘sneakily subverted contemporary codes of etiquette.’<sup>97</sup> Looser points out that Garrud ‘evinced a strong taste for the theatrical’ pursuing ‘the relations between jujutsu, theatre and political activism through the “suffragette play”, an alternative genre of women’s performance flourishing at the time.’ with which, the evidence in this thesis shows, Mayer would have been closely involved, both personally, and through her family.<sup>98</sup>

Newspapers of the day treated women’s attitudes to participation in violence with differing themes. Often, they indulged in anti-suffrage propaganda. In 1914 following an attack by police at a meeting, *The Daily Record* printed a photograph of a collection of weapons, including clubs and a pistol, under the title ‘The Lethal Weapons of the Suffragettes’.<sup>99</sup> Alternatively, newspapers could treat the matter lightly, and in 1909, *The Hull Daily Mail* featured a sketch of a woman attending a suffrage event about to be apprehended by a large police constable holding hand cuffs, while another woman called to her “It’s alright dear, don’t get alarmed, throw him over your left shoulder, pinion arms, and then half nelson!”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Leslie Hill, ‘Suffragettes Invented Performance Art,’ in Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (eds), *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance* (London: Routledge 2000) pp.150-156.

<sup>94</sup> Harold L. Smith, *The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign* (London: Routledge 2009) p.122 and 126.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Jiu-Jitsu for Militants’ *New York Times* 20 August 1913 p.4.

<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press 1999) p.240.

<sup>97</sup> Godfrey, *Femininity* pp.99-101.

<sup>98</sup> Looser, ‘Radical Bodies’ p.11.

<sup>99</sup> ‘The Lethal Weapons of the Suffragettes’ *Daily Record* 14 March 1914 p.8.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Illustrated “Mail”’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 April 1909, p.3.

Political publicity and propaganda in newspapers, utilising *jūjutsu* or judo, would come to resonate through Mayer's life and would ultimately involve her own image and words, and this is a key aspect of this work. The popularity of *jūjutsu* in Mayer's formative years, and the political and gendered discourse that it accompanied, could go some way to explaining Mayer's later interest in the Japanese martial arts, and closely links to such themes within this thesis.

The construction of Mayer as a female judo pioneer and role model, is also a key aspect of this thesis, and as such it has been important to consider the socio-economic status of other female *jūdōka*. Goodger's research argues that early *jūdōka* in Britain were from 'upper-class' origins.<sup>101</sup> By addressing the question concerning the placement of Mayer within society and looking at the specific backgrounds of some of the other women involved in judo in the early twentieth century at the Budokwai, for comparison with Mayer, this thesis seeks to add significant detail to Goodger's work and to some extent, contest the notion.

Responding to Svinth's and Bowen's work, and the 2011 call from Miarka et al to provide revisionist accounts of the female place in judo history,<sup>102</sup> this work outlines Mayer's early life, her career in the theatre, her upward social mobility before her trip to Japan, and subsequent descent into poverty.

### 1.3 Class and Society

Research into Mayer's place within the social strata of the period, also brings a consideration of theatrical hierarchy and social class distinction in that profession. Davis discusses the socio-economic perceptions of performers within Victorian culture, and how, unlike many other professions, there was a wide and diverse demographic from which the group were made up. She also considers the conspicuous disparity prevalent in the profession:

'The heterogeneity of performers' experience, competence, salaries, and social classes made them anomalous among middle class professionals, while the differences between their art and others' trades set them apart

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<sup>101</sup> Brian Goodger, 'The Development of Judo in Britain: A Sociological Study,' (Thesis for Ph.D., University of London, 1981) pp.97-101.

<sup>102</sup> Miarka, Bastos Marques and Franchini, 'Reinterpreting,' pp.1016-1029.

socially and existentially from the people of the factory, mill, and workshop.’<sup>103</sup>

Using the current literature on the social identity of these working women, along with primary source material, this work investigates Mayer’s socio-economic background through a brief investigation of her parents’ position within society and the theatrical profession and a more detailed analysis of her own trajectory.

Mayer was born at the *fin de siècle*, and Powell states that the Victorian period held the catalyst for female emancipation through the theatre, noting that ‘Women were exhilarated, sometimes liberated, by the authoritative speaking voice and the professional opportunity that, uniquely, the theatre offered them.’<sup>104</sup> Equally, using their talent, the individual could improve their standing in society by making good employment choices or by marrying out of their societal position. Both of these methods were utilised by Mayer, managing to gain employment in highly regarded West End shows, and making two ‘successful’ marriages. The thesis contends that Powell’s argument could provide part of the reason for her acceptance within Japanese society, and for her use by the establishment for publicity or propaganda. The thesis argues that were she not from seemingly ‘high society’, she may have been treated very differently.

Gardner refers to a ‘mythical hierarchy’ within the theatre, and the ‘real theatrical families’ lauded by ‘Alma Ellerslie’.<sup>105</sup> However, that hierarchy existed purely in terms of mass popularity and employability, and Mayer’s standing would have altered according to the family’s success. Gale stresses that ‘the relationship between theatre, politics and social change’ was a complex entity.<sup>106</sup> The history of the movement for emancipation and enfranchisement is

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<sup>103</sup> Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge 1991) p.3.

<sup>104</sup> Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1997) p.xi.

<sup>105</sup> Viv Gardner, ‘The Three Nobodys,’ in Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (eds), *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2004) p.17.

<sup>106</sup> Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p.1.

developed by the connection between the acting profession and suffrage.<sup>107</sup> Holledge, through mainly auto/biographical and oral history research, postulates how the Actresses' Franchise League (A.F.L.), founded in 1908, supported both the N.U.W.S.S. and the W.S.P.U.<sup>108</sup> This is a view adhered to by Hirshfield, exemplifying influential founding members of the A.F.L. who held 'strong associations' with the W.S.P.U. and its militant tactics.<sup>109</sup> The thesis shows Mayer's connections to these groups as a young woman through her family and profession, providing evidence for her motivations and ability as a female combative sporting pioneer. The interweaving of Mayer's own familial, social, and professional influences is analysed through the biographical framework, considering whether this impacted on her ability not only to partake in her choice of leisure activities, but also to become a role model for women in the early twentieth century.

## 1.4 Methodology

This thesis is the first Doctoral-length study to be produced on Sarah Mayer, as a neglected individual in the inter-war history of Anglo-Japanese relations, itself a relatively underdeveloped field of study in the history of sport. The broad approach has been to use a biographical framework. As Chapter Three will indicate, Mayer went to Japan as an assertive, politically aware actress who had a relatively relaxed amateur enthusiasm for judo. During her tour, and evidenced by her letters and documentation found in Japan, she trained at the very highest level of what was then male elite sporting performance, and, by being designated a black belt in Japan by the leading teachers, became a role model, through being conferred as an elite specialist. The letters that form the basis of Chapter Four are relatively rare sources for the historian of sport, particularly of young female athletes, and through them, we have an insight, in Mayer's own words, into how her sporting celebrity was constructed.

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<sup>107</sup> Naomi Paxton, *Stage Rights!: The Actresses' Franchise League, Activism and Politics 1908-58* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2018); Katherine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage* (London: Palgrave 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press 1981) p.53.

<sup>109</sup> Claire Hirshfield, 'The Actresses' Franchise League and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage 1908-1914,' *Theatre Research International* 10:2 (1985) pp. 129-153.

However, epistolary sources are not without their own difficulties for historians, because of the nature of their private and public information. They were of course written to be read, but how widely? Moreover, in this case, as the increasing politicisation of Mayer's feats by the Japanese government, and her exceptionalism, resonated through both Japanese and international press reports, we must consider the extent to which she was aware of how she was being portrayed in the media, and perceived back home. Ultimately, there is no way of knowing this, but the thesis argues that this perception, perhaps, explains why her fame was so short lived on her return to the UK. Therefore, the personal letters combine with archival documents and media accounts to enable a critical analysis of the rapid rise, and just as precipitous fall, of Sarah Mayer as a pioneer of the Japanese art of judo.

Any work concerning Japan or 'The East' from a Western perspective, is bound to consider Saidian theories of *Orientalism*, although as Jenny Holt notes, 'there is a consensus among scholars that Japan's relationship with the west fails to fit within the Orientalist paradigms set out by Edward Said'.<sup>110</sup> Rosen points out the inherent difficulties with a term which 'lumps just about all the peoples from Turkey to Tokyo under one rubric'.<sup>111</sup> However, as Nishihara indicates, many 'Japanese intellectuals, whether Marxist or conservative, are sympathetic towards Said's unsparing criticism toward the west'.<sup>112</sup> 'Orientalism' is defined by Said through two routes, firstly 'the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery and practice', and secondly, 'that collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line'.<sup>113</sup> The question is, whether Japan conforms to the 'Oriental' view. This thesis contends that if viewed through the lens of sport, and in agreement with Nishihara, the Japanese perspective is not comfortably categorised through the theories of coloniser and colonised associated with west and east.<sup>114</sup> The research shows

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<sup>110</sup> Jenny Holt, 'Samurai and Gentlemen: The Anglophone Japan Corpus and New Avenues into Orientalism (Part I),' *Literature Compass* 11:1 (2014) pp.36-46.

<sup>111</sup> Steven L. Rosen, 'Japan as Other: Orientalism and Cultural Conflict,' *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 4 (October 2000) pp.17-24.

<sup>112</sup> Daisuke Nishihara, 'Said, Orientalism, and Japan,' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 25 (2005) pp.241-253.

<sup>113</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London and New York: Penguin Books 2003) p.73.

<sup>114</sup> Nishihara, 'Said, Orientalism, and Japan' pp.241-253.

that Mayer was both agent of her own destiny and acted upon Japanese culture in her pioneering feats, but also was used as a vehicle for Japanese propaganda. Furthermore, with the international ambitions of judo, we could consider the sport as part of a wider Japanese aspiration to influence the 'Occident' and trends towards a westernised nation.

Bearing this problematic categorisation in mind, and with a biographical framework chosen as the most useful way to present the evidence for this work, we must consider the challenges this presents. As Bourdieu contends, biography should not be understood as a 'unique and self-sufficient series of successive events' but as a subject within its matrix.<sup>115</sup> Responding to this important monition, throughout the extended period of research for this work, as well as concentrating on archival documentation specifically related to Mayer, this thesis has sought to gain an understanding of the geographical and cultural context within which she operated. As such, this work includes discussion and conclusion of the contextual issues which have emerged through the primary source research.

Martin Cortazzi states that biographical or narrative research often has a chronological focus, or 'emphasis on sequence'.<sup>116</sup> With this work, a thematic approach could also be considered, but this could bring difficulties of repetition of sources and detail within the chapters, when concentrating on an individual rather than a wider concept. Therefore, to gain a clear picture of Mayer's place within the British social class structure at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the impact of such in her pioneering Japanese exploits, the chronological approach to the sourcing and reasoning of documentation relating to her life, within a qualitative paradigm, provides a more comprehensible framework for the myriad of diverse information and data.<sup>117</sup>

Using a biographical approach does not detract from the contribution to other studies and historiographies.<sup>118</sup> Goldman considers 'the tracing of an individual

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<sup>115</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion,' in Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (eds), *Identity: A Reader* (London: Sage 2000) p.302.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Cortazzi, *Narrative Analysis* (London: Falmer Press 2002) p.74.

<sup>117</sup> Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography (Qualitative Research Methods Vol 17)* (London: Sage 1989) p.50.

<sup>118</sup> Lois W. Banner, 'Biography as History,' *American Historical Review* 114:3 (2009) pp.579-580.

life' to be a relevant and useful way to present history.<sup>119</sup> Banner describes the role biography can play in historical context:

'individuals influence historical development. And from this perspective, studying the life story of an individual might be seen as akin to studying the history of a city, a region, or a state as a way of understanding broad social and cultural phenomena.'<sup>120</sup>

Banner defines 'new biography' as appearing from the 1990s and being influenced by feminist, postmodern and race historiographies.<sup>121</sup> Mayer's life has a relevance to the women's movement, and the fight for universal suffrage of the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries. It relates to women's roles in industry and leisure, as well as gender and cross-cultural issues between the East and West, and the thesis undoubtedly receives influence from these areas of feminism, postmodernism and racial history.

Banner's description of new biography emerges from a tradition which has seen many so-called 'modern' incarnations of the genre.<sup>122</sup> From Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* - which broke away from the hagiographical practice of 'great works of great men', finding fault with his subjects, and using a wit rarely seen since Boswell's somewhat vicarious observations of his friend Johnson - to Edmund De Waal and his fascinating concept of finding a family history through objects, in *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance*, published in 2010.<sup>123</sup>

The trend for taking a revisionist biographical stance accelerated through the last few decades of the twentieth century into the current period. Tomalin's *The Invisible Woman*, for example, covered Charles Dickens' adulterous life with Nelly Ternan.<sup>124</sup> Holroyd's excellent work on Violet Trefusis and her relationship with Vita Sackville West, used place and time, along with his own perspective,

<sup>119</sup> Lawrence Goldman, 'History and Biography,' *Historical Research* 89:245 (2016) p.405.

<sup>120</sup> Banner, 'Biography as History' p.582.

<sup>121</sup> Banner, 'Biography as History' pp.580-581.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Holroyd, 'Our Friends the Dead,' *The Guardian* [online] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jun/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview36> (accessed June 2018); Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010) pp.27-46.

<sup>123</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (New York: G B Putnam's Sons 1918); Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London: Chatto & Windus 2010).

<sup>124</sup> Claire Tomalin, *The Invisible Woman* (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 1990).



to engage the reader within the story.<sup>125</sup> Amelia Earhart's life and death were investigated with a new emphasis on the influence of her husband and manager, G. P. Putnam, by Lovell.<sup>126</sup> However, as a new subject, Sarah Mayer's achievements are best examined by placing her whole life within a historical, geographical and social context, and the alternative of taking a part section, or life event as the focus, would be inappropriate, as there would be no existing work within which to place the limited discourse.

Historical biography, like many of the source documents used for such, should be considered, as with all history writing, to have a subjective and 'unwitting testimony' as defined by Marwick; the hidden and (mostly) subconscious agenda, brought about by the author's political or social bent.<sup>127</sup> It can be too easy, and perhaps understandable, considering the commitment involved, for the biographer to become enamoured with their subject, and lose objectivity. Also, as Foreman notes in her biography of *Georgiana*, '[The work's] integrity becomes jeopardised when, without realising it, a biographer mistakes his own feelings for the subject's'.<sup>128</sup> It has been important within this thesis to be aware of these issues, and to strive for impartiality and detachment.

Biographical writing comes with a number of choices regarding contextual content.<sup>129</sup> Daniel Snowman recalls Antonia Frazer's tongue in cheek comment apropos her biography of Marie Antoinette, that to avoid an extremely large volume, she might just insert 'a sentence to the effect that, at this time "the French Revolution happened"!'<sup>130</sup> Mayer's life covers a complex era in British history, with two world wars, the culmination of the women's suffrage movement and the rapidly changing relationship between Britain and Japan. It also takes place through the genesis of judo on the world stage. This thesis sets Mayer's life within this historical context, adding to the debates through, as Snowman

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<sup>125</sup> Michael Holroyd, *A Book of Secrets: Illegitimate Daughters, Absent Fathers* (London: Chatto & Windus 2010).

<sup>126</sup> Mary S. Lovell, *Amelia Earhart: The Sound of Wings* (London: Abacus 2009).

<sup>127</sup> Arthur Marwick, 'The Fundamentals of History: What is History?' *Institute of Historical Research: Focus* [online] <http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Whatishistory/marwick1.html> (accessed July 2016).

<sup>128</sup> Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Random House 1999) preface.

<sup>129</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, 'Biographical Research,' in: Clive Seale et al (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: Sage 2004) pp. 48-64.

<sup>130</sup> Daniel Snowman 'Historical Biography,' *History Today* 64:11 (November 2014) [online] [www.historytoday.com](http://www.historytoday.com) (accessed September 2016).

argues, the 'micro' data, within the 'macro' perspective, which can give important insights into the era.<sup>131</sup>

One of the key challenges identified by Haslam, with biography, and particularly historical biography, is the amount of time taken to collect the enormous volume of data to define a person's life.<sup>132</sup> In the case of this thesis much of the primary source research has been undertaken over the last decade, allowing for completion of the written work within an academic timescale. A particular challenge with a work on Mayer, is the dialectic nature of the subject. She is typical, yet atypical. She is representative of new found freedoms for women in the inter-war period, yet unusual in her choice of sport or art form and her decision as a married woman to spend a year away from her husband to study in the homeland of that sport.<sup>133</sup> Close analysis of the historical context within each document or manuscript is key to the evaluation and resolution of the dichotomy, and the complexity of a woman of diverse interests.

A study of Mayer's life also encompasses a multiplicity of culture. Biography, according to Haslam, as with all historical writing, relies on judgements, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the use of cross-cultural sources.<sup>134</sup> The need for accurate, yet sensitive translation within this research, of foreign documents and manuscripts, particularly those from Japan - many using older traditional Japanese text – has been important. Mayer's time in Japan, and significance within Anglo-Japanese relations, and her contribution to women's judo both in Britain and Japan are vital components within the work, and therefore cannot be ignored. I have undertaken two research trips to Japan, firstly to Tokyo in November/December 2015, and secondly to Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo in September 2017.

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<sup>131</sup> Snowman 'Historical Biography'.

<sup>132</sup> Jonathan Haslam, 'Biography and its Importance to History,' *Past and Future, Institute for Historical Research* (autumn/winter 2012) pp.10-11.

<sup>133</sup> For social history perspectives on women in the inter-war period see, Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012); Selina Todd, 'Young Women, Work, and Leisure in Inter-war England,' *The Historical Journal* 48:3 (2005) pp. 789–809.

<sup>134</sup> Haslam, 'Biography and its Importance' p.11; Elizabeth Ann Pollard, 'Rethinking Primary Sources for Cross-Cultural Interaction in World History: "Standard" Problems and Connected Possibilities,' *Social Studies Review* 49:1 (March 2010) pp.38-41.

As a British researcher with limited knowledge of the Japanese language, it has been with the invaluable help of interpreters, translators and other archivists and academics within Britain and Japan, that this aspect of Mayer's life has been addressed. The contacts made during the first few months of this study, and the subsequent networks built up over time, have been vital in the completion of this work.

Whether using international sources, or those closer to home, biography can be fraught with the dangers of misinterpretation, or imposed interpretation. Historical biography holds a precarious position between creative writing and non-fiction, and more recently, literary treatments of sport have come under analysis. Hill determines that all history is 'a form of literature'.<sup>135</sup> Bale, Christensen and Pfister clearly show the difficulties associated with biographical accounts of sporting personalities, discussing the differences between a 'life history' and an 'academic biography'.<sup>136</sup> The authors distinguish the former as having a social science association, and the latter as being from the humanities.

According to Oldfield, within recent years, historians have tended towards a localised approach to specific sports, arenas, or participants and competitors.<sup>137</sup> This has given a closer inspection of differing class involvements, but has generally concentrated on a particular social group, be it working, middle or upper class. Otherwise, a prosopographical approach, as defined by Erard and Bancel, to determine trends within certain groups, whilst an extremely useful tool, giving important insights into those groups, of course cannot give the whole picture concerning an individual.<sup>138</sup> The ability to fit Sarah Mayer into a prosopographic study group is problematic. She appears on initial findings to sit within a few different sets, for example, transnational female athletes, sporting pioneers, early twentieth-century actresses or playwrights. But with a more detailed look into the evidence surrounding her life story, none of these groups quite meet the complexity that her experiences and individuality create.

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<sup>135</sup> Jeffrey Hill, *Sport and the Literary Imagination: Essays in History, Literature, and Sport* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2006) p.27.

<sup>136</sup> John Bale, Mette K. Christensen and Gertrud Pfister (eds), *Writing Lives in Sport: Biographies, Life-histories and Methods*, (Oxford: Aarhus University Press 2004) p.11.

<sup>137</sup> Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sports History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32:15 (2015) pp.1855-1882.

<sup>138</sup> Carine Erard and Nicolas Bancel, 'Prosopographical Analysis of Sports Elites: Overview and Evaluation of a Seminal Study,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 24:1 (2007) pp.67-79.

Likewise, Mayer left limited known autobiographical evidence, other than her letters. An analysis of these letters reveals descriptions of world travel in the decade leading up to the Second World War, the judo masters and venues in Britain and Japan, as well as judo techniques, giving important insights for historians of cultural and sporting disciplines within a global context. Though valuable, these sources allow glimpses of a woman entertaining her mentor through her writing, and as such are reliable only to a degree. Therefore, biography, rather than a reliance on autobiographical information or prosopography, provides the main methodological approach.

Liz Rohan considers life as ‘an evolving story of disparate details that eventually come together, upon reflection, to make a whole’.<sup>139</sup> This thesis, through the very nature of the fragmentation and number of source materials, endeavours to piece together the specific data needed, through the minutiae of the resources. A conscientious analysis of reliable primary source material with a microhistorical focus, can only improve and enhance knowledge, giving a greater understanding of global cultural and empirical data. Renders and de Haan argue that microhistory ‘[is not only] concerned with the “exceptional normal” or the “normal exception”, but [it] should rather be exploited in order to place the broader historiography in proper perspective, and perhaps alter it a little.’<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Liz Rohan, ‘Stitching and Writing a Life’ in Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan (eds), *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 2008) p.148.

<sup>140</sup> Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing* (Boston: Brill 2014) p.6.

## 2. Exeunt Fairies

‘No small amount of amusement is caused by Miss Winifred Tapping’

### 2.1 Introduction

To begin the resolution of the research question related to Sarah Mayer’s identity, and her social positioning, this chapter takes a broadly chronological perspective of Sarah’s early life, from her parents’ background, to her first marriage, reflecting the key theme of class and social mobility within sport in the early twentieth century. Investigating these years is essential for a deeper understanding of the woman who became a sporting pioneer and role model for her gender, and for her use as an example in further research.

Through the experiences of Sarah and her family within the context of their working lives, the chapter also looks at the connections between theatre and the suffrage movement, and the burgeoning interest in the Japanese martial arts in the early twentieth century, thus placing Sarah within a politicised and gendered sphere from an early age.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter demonstrates Sarah’s growth in both confidence and social status, as she established an entrepreneurial role at a young age, drawing on works by authors such as Gale, Gardner and Davis, to situate her within the context of the gendered working experience in that period.<sup>2</sup> While investigating the social stratum into which she was born and within which she worked, we look at the early influential characters who helped to shape her future.

The first part of this chapter concerning Sarah’s birth and family background, by its nature has a more fragmentary structure than the more chronologically arranged continuation of the work.

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Tilghman, ‘Staging Suffrage: Women, Politics, and the Edwardian Theater [sic],’ *Comparative Drama* 45:4 (Winter 2011) pp.339-360; Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage* (New York: Palgrave 2001); Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner, *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre, and Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2004); Maggie B Gale and Viv Gardner, *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000); Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge 1991); Jan McDonald, ‘Lesser Ladies of the Victorian Stage,’ *Theatre Research International* 13:4 (1988) pp.234-249.

## 2.2 Birth and Parents' Background 1896 – 1905

Overlooking the River Thames, south-west of London, lies Battersea Park. In 1896, there were gardens, playing fields, and wide carriage drives, upon which emancipated women rode their bicycles.<sup>3</sup> Research carried out at the Wandsworth Heritage Service, revealed that the park was overlooked by new, purpose built, so-called mansion flats, and it was at 48 Albany Mansions, Albert Bridge Road, on 17 October 1896, that Winifred Sarah Benedict Tapping was born, later to become known as Sarah Mayer.<sup>4</sup>

Sarah was the daughter of Alfred Benedict Tapping, an actor and touring theatre manager, and Alice Amelia Fishwick, an actress, known on the stage as Alice Farleigh.<sup>5</sup>



[Photo by Tolma.  
W. BRO. A. B. TAPPING, W.M.  
(Araph Lodge, 1319).



Photo by Tolma, Sydney.

Miss Alice Farleigh "At Home."

2. 'W. Bro. A. B. Tapping' *The Era* 28 November 1910. 3. 'Miss Alice Farleigh' *Table Talk* 14 August 1902

The 1911 census return for the family specified that there were four children born to the couple, with three surviving.<sup>6</sup> In the census Alfred and Alice claimed

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Hanlon, 'Cycling to Suffrage: The Bicycle and the British Women's Suffrage Movement, 1900-1914,' (paper presented at International Cycling History Conference, Paris, May 2011); David Rubinstein, 'Cycling in the 1890s,' *Victorian Studies* 21:1 (1977) pp.47-71; Sean Creighton 'Organised Cycling and Politics: the 1890s & 1900s in Battersea,' *The Sports Historian* 15:1 (1995) pp.65-79.

<sup>4</sup> For information regarding the building of Albany Mansions see 'Conveyance of Land and Buildings ... Albert Road, Battersea,' (1895) D101/380, Wandsworth Heritage Services, UK; Keith Alan Bailey, 'The Metamorphosis of Battersea 1800-1914: A Building History,' (Thesis for Ph.D., The Open University, 1995); Sarah Mayer's Birth Certificate, Winifred Sarah Tapping, Wandsworth, 16 Oct 1896, G.R.O.

<sup>5</sup> Birth Certificate, Winifred Sarah Tapping, 16 Oct 1896.

<sup>6</sup> Registrar General, 1911 England Census, Class RG14; Piece 2745, T.N.A.; Marriage Certificate, Alfred Benedict Tapping and Alice Amelia Fishwick, Lewisham, 8 April 1926, G.R.O.

to have been married for 16 years and were living together as husband and wife, however, their later marriage certificate shows that, at that point in time, there had been no wedding.<sup>7</sup> Alfred was already married to someone else. Thus, the evidence shows Sarah placed as the illegitimate daughter of mid-scale actors who were willing to lie to the authorities, and it is through this evidence that we begin to consider the complexity of her social positioning.

Alfred himself was the son of an actor. His father, also known on stage as Alfred Tapping (actually Tappin, circa 1824-1880), was listed in the census returns of 1851 and 1861 as a 'comedian' and a 'comedian and photographer' respectively.<sup>8</sup> His obituary in *The Era* described how he was 'always valued by Managers for the careful manner in which he represented small but important parts', and he was most associated with the Princess's, Lyceum, and Surrey theatres.<sup>9</sup> Alfred junior followed his father into the profession, and in time took control of his own affairs, starting a touring company, and initially marrying an actress who was also the child of an actor-comedian.

Alfred junior's first marriage in 1877 linked him to an important theatrical dynasty (see Appendix 1) therefore raising his importance in the professional hierarchy. His wife was Florence Ellen Cowell, later, and until her death, known on the stage as Mrs. A. B. Tapping.<sup>10</sup> Florence was from the Fairbrother and Cowell acting dynasty, and the mother of Emilie Cowell, whose own stage name was Sydney Fairbrother. Sydney was born on 31 July 1873 with no father listed at registration.<sup>11</sup>

Sydney is perhaps the most well-known of the family, and her autobiography is a significant piece of evidence in this thesis.<sup>12</sup> It gives vital information illuminating how the theatrical family worked both together, and apart, and shows the regard with which this particular family were perceived within the industry.

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<sup>7</sup> 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 2745.

<sup>8</sup> Death Register Index, England and Wales 1837-1915, Alfred Tappin, Saint Saviour Southwark, 1880, December quarter, 1d 54, G.R.O.; Home Office, 1851 England Census, Class HO107, Piece 2052, Folio 530, p. 4, T.N.A.; Registrar General, 1861 England Census, Class RG9, Piece 334, Folio 53, p. 1, T.N.A.

<sup>9</sup> 'Death of Mr Alfred Tapping' *The Era* 22 January 1881, p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Marriage Register Index, Alfred Benedict Tappin and Florence Ellen Cowell, E. Ashford, March quarter, 1877, 2a:845, G.R.O.

<sup>11</sup> Birth Certificate, Emilie Sydney Cowell, Saint Saviour, 31 July 1873, G.R.O.

<sup>12</sup> Sydney Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd 1939).

To understand Alfred's importance within the context of the industry, we draw on the work of Tracy C. Davis, who demonstrates that the companies which he ran for a large proportion of his working life, both individually and in collaboration with other producers, were an inherent part of an enormous industry of provincial playhouses.<sup>13</sup> In 1843, the repeal of the licencing act, which permitted only two theatres in London to present so-called legitimate plays, encouraged a massive boom in theatre building across the country.<sup>14</sup> Industrial development and expansion through the nineteenth century had created immeasurable growth in provincial cities and towns.<sup>15</sup> This created a large, new, eager audience for all entertainments, including sporting and theatrical, with disposable income to spend, and spare time, albeit limited, to fill.<sup>16</sup> Touring theatre companies, including the Tapping family business, took their shows around Britain, to the various playhouses, becoming well-known across the country.

We can begin to discern the influence Alfred may have had over Sarah's life through Sydney's reported experience. Sydney claimed to have remained very close to the man she thought of as her father, and felt it was due to him that she became as successful as she did. He had insisted she was properly educated and sent her away to school from the age of eight until she was fifteen, even though her fees as a successful child actress would have helped the family finances.<sup>17</sup> Alfred and Florence had been running a theatre company and acting together for several years. However, it was only a few years after Sydney began to work for Alfred as a young adult that her mother and stepfather's marriage started to break down.

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<sup>13</sup> Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) pp.195-199.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Green, *Encyclopedia of Censorship (Facts on File Library of World History)* in Nicholas J. Karolides, (series ed), (New York: Facts on File 2005) p.568; Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991) p.7.

<sup>15</sup> For excellent overviews of economic industrial growth through the nineteenth century in Britain see, David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969); N. F. R. Crafts and C. K. Harley, 'Output Growth and the British Industrial Revolution: A Restatement of the Crafts-Harley View' *The Economic History Review* 45:4 (1992) pp.703-730.

<sup>16</sup> Derek Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1993) pp.324; Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) pp.13-30; A. N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Arrow Books 2003) pp.521-524.

<sup>17</sup> Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* p.93.



Sydney described Alfred thus:

'I am not making any insinuations when I say that my father in his dealings with women was the complete expert. I am just stating a fact. He was an adorable little man and women adored him.'<sup>18</sup>

It is believed that Alice Farleigh, a former barmaid in her family's public house, started working for the Tapping company in around the spring of 1894 and she and Alfred became close.<sup>19</sup> It seems to have been the last straw for Florence and she looked for employment options away from the family.<sup>20</sup> This demonstrates the complex background which preceded Sarah's birth, and the social and professional challenges involved for her family.

The research has shown that the unconventionality of the family situation meant that Sarah was born illegitimate and was to stay that way for a large percentage of her life. By the summer of 1894, Florence had stopped appearing in notices for Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Tapping's company, and, using this evidence, in conjunction with Sydney's testimony, it would appear that the couple separated.<sup>21</sup> The later marriage of Alfred and Alice shortly after the death of Florence, combined with unsuccessful searches at The National Archives for relevant papers, would suggest that there never was a divorce.<sup>22</sup>

An indication of Alfred's importance in the profession, and the fame which he and his wife held came in August 1895, when *The Era* held an entire column devoted to 'A chat with Mr. A. B. Tapping', in which he put forward his opinions of other managers and directors, and at the end of the article, it stated that although his wife Florence Cowell had been working away, 'eventually she [would] resume an active participation in Mr. Tapping's managerial adventures'.<sup>23</sup> August 1895 was the same month that Alice gave birth to her first

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<sup>18</sup> Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* p.95.

<sup>19</sup> Earliest notices found of Alice Farleigh in A. B. Tapping's company are: 'Royal Clarence Theatre, Pontypridd,' *The Era* 7 April 1894 p.21; 'Theatre Royal, Cardiff' *The Era* 14 April 1894 p.19.

<sup>20</sup> Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* p.101.

<sup>21</sup> Florence appeared in notices for A. B. Tapping's company until August 1894, after which, this work has found no further mention of her with the company in either *The Stage*, *The Era*, or local newspaper notices; Fairbrother *Through an Old Stage Door* p.101.

<sup>22</sup> The High Court of Justice: Probate, Divorce and Admiralty division, J77, T.N.A.; Marriage Certificate, Alfred Benedict Tappin and Alice Amelia Fishwick.

<sup>23</sup> 'A Chat with Mr A. B. Tapping' *The Era* 24 August 1895 p.8.

child with Alfred.<sup>24</sup> When Florence left the company, Sydney, at the age of twenty-one, continued to work with her stepfather. Sydney moved onwards and upwards in the theatrical world, as did Florence who appeared in many West End productions and was involved with the early Shakespearian Festivals at Stratford.<sup>25</sup> Alfred and Alice moved on with their lives together too, and their dramatic ambitions continued.

Sarah's unconventional beginnings continued through her childhood. Within five months of Sarah's birth her parents were to be found again in the theatrical press. The company had gone back on tour, and the pair were appearing in *The Idler* at The Prince of Wales theatre in Great Grimsby, Hull.<sup>26</sup> It is impossible to know whether they took the baby touring with them. The alternative was to leave children at home with a helper, if it could be afforded, but from the very start, Sarah was exposed to a life of travel.<sup>27</sup>

For the remainder of 1897, the couple were busy acting, both together and apart. There were engagements from the south coast to Lowestoft in the east, and to Swansea in Wales; Gardner explains how 'the sophisticated rail network enabled companies to travel between these venues.'<sup>28</sup> During this period, a young actor named Harley Granville Barker was working for the company. Barker was to become one of the most significant personalities in modern theatre history.<sup>29</sup> Along with his mentor George Bernard Shaw, his connection to Alfred would become important to the family, and he was to be an influential figure both politically and professionally, in young Sarah's life.

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<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Alice Tapping, 8 October 1895, St Mary, Ewell, Surrey: Surrey, England, Baptisms, 1813-1912, [online] [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 2015).

<sup>25</sup> For evidence of Sydney's later success see British Pathé short film, *Stars at Home, Miss Sydney Fairbrother*, 1923 [online] <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/stars-at-home-miss-sydney-fairbrother-the-young> (accessed February 2018); 'Shakespeare Summer Festival' *Leamington Spa Courier* 8 August 1919 p.4.

<sup>26</sup> 'Great Grimsby' *The Stage* 18 Feb 1897 p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* p.62.

<sup>28</sup> Viv Gardner, 'Provincial Stages 1900-1934,' in Baz Kershaw (ed), *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Vol 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004) p.63.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Carlson, 'Politicizing Harley Granville Barker: Suffragists and Shakespeare,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 22:2 (May 2006) pp. 122-140; For an overview of Granville Barker's contribution to modern theatre see, Christine Dymkowski, *Harley Granville Barker: A Preface to Modern Shakespeare* (London: Associated University Presses 1986).

In 1899 Alice gave birth again. A brother for Sarah, named Thomas Alfred (Tom).<sup>30</sup> Two years later in early 1901, another brother, Charles Benedict joined the family.<sup>31</sup> In the 1901 census return for the family, Alice's niece, twenty-two-year-old Jane Ellen Tookey also appeared.<sup>32</sup> In this record she had no occupation listed, but on the 1911 census, where she also appeared in the Tapping family house, she was a 'Children's Governess – at home', so it could be surmised that she was looking after the children while their parents were away, and it is with this evidence that we begin to see how Sarah's independent spirit would develop.

Independence and movement around the country were day to day occurrences in Sarah's early life, as travel away from home was a regular event for Alfred and Alice. As Woodworth comments 'Professional performers were practically professional travelers [sic]'.<sup>33</sup> However, just before Christmas, on 20 December 1901, when their youngest child Charles was less than a year old, they undertook a much lengthier trip, setting sail on R.M.S. *Austral* with George Musgrove's company for a tour of Australia and New Zealand.<sup>34</sup>

The tour lasted for two years and involved substantial coverage of Australia and New Zealand. In March 1902 the company even travelled to Tasmania, the ship's record amusingly showing that also on board were '7 heifers, 1 pig, 1 dog'.<sup>35</sup> The tour received a lot of attention in the Antipodean press, and Alice was to have her moment in the spotlight with a lengthy two page article in Melbourne's *Table Talk*, chatting about her home life and marriage, as well as the reasons she was in Australia.<sup>36</sup> It was a mix of sycophantic prose and biographical detail. The biographical information of course, can only be

<sup>30</sup> Birth Register Index, Thomas Alfred Tapping, 1899, Wandsworth, March quarter, 1d:636, G.R.O.

<sup>31</sup> Birth Register Index, Charles Benedict Tapping, 1901, Wandsworth, March quarter, 1d:572, G.R.O.

<sup>32</sup> Registrar General, 1901 England Census, Class RG13, Piece 440, Folio 106, p.38, T.N.A.

<sup>33</sup> Christine Woodworth, 'Luggage, Lodgings, and Landladies: The Practicalities for Actresses on the British Provincial Circuits in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,' *Theatre Symposium* 22:1 (2014) p.22-137.

<sup>34</sup> R.M.S. *Austral*, 20 December 1901, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, Victoria, Australia, 1839–1923 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed 2015); 'Miss Alice Farleigh' *Otago Witness* 8 April 1903, p.42.

<sup>35</sup> Reports of Ships Arrivals with Lists of Passengers, Film Number SLTX/AO/MB/19, Series Number MB2/39/1/49, Archives Office of Tasmania, Australia, [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed September 2016).

<sup>36</sup> 'Miss Alice Farleigh at Home' *Table Talk* (Melbourne) 14 August 1902 p.21 [online] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/145707864/17382028> (accessed December 2017).

confirmed or refuted with a triangulation of corroborating evidence, however it holds useful information for the thesis, and an analysis of the text can give an insight into the family's professional and social standing as well as detail for Sarah's early life.

The interview told how Alice had to leave behind her 'little ties', the 'three blonde babies', confirming that they were left in the care of their cousin and governess and 'a good nurse'.<sup>37</sup> This was corroborated using a search of the passenger list for Alfred and Alice's journey, where no children could be found travelling with them, not absolute proof that they were not there, but there were other children listed as part of other families, so it would seem that the young Tappings were indeed left behind. Chris Watts advised in a lecture at The National Archives, UK, the importance of checking for both departure and return passenger lists to confirm details of those travelling.<sup>38</sup> Robert Swierenga however, indicates problems associated with the use of passenger lists, namely, the gaps in the source material.<sup>39</sup> Although the return journey from Australia could not be found, other maritime journeys within the tour have been researched, and this technique also serves, in this case, to fill in further biographical details.

Alice explained in the interview that Alfred had been suffering from poor health, and the offer of the tour for him, although contracted as Stage Manager as well as an actor, meant time away from the stresses of running his own company. Alice was not planning to travel with him initially because of the three children, but she decided that being separated from Alfred would make her 'lonely and anxious', so Musgrove, the tour manager, having been to see her perform in another production, offered her 'Understudy' and 'Small Parts'.<sup>40</sup> Considering Alfred's undoubted charm over women described by Sydney in her autobiography, Alice could have been concerned about him travelling the world without her. Otherwise, the couple may have been seeking time away from their

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<sup>37</sup> 'Miss Alice Farleigh at Home' p.21.

<sup>38</sup> Chris Watts, 'Every Journey has Two Ends,' National Archives Podcast (2009) [online] <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/every-journey-has-two-ends-edit.mp3> (accessed October 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, 'List upon list: The Ship Passenger Records and Immigration Research,' *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10:3 (Spring 1991) pp.42-54.

<sup>40</sup> 'Miss Alice Farleigh at Home' p.21.

young family. The trip would have been a very different proposition with three children under five years old.<sup>41</sup>

This body of evidence for the period shows that from the age of five until seven, Sarah was separated from her parents who were working on the other side of the world. The couple returned home, most likely in late 1903, having travelled from Melbourne to Fremantle in Western Australia in September of that year.<sup>42</sup> It could be assumed that the children might have been affected by this lengthy separation from their parents. Alice's family ran a public house in Islington called the Prince Edward, where Alice herself had been working before her acting ambitions took over.<sup>43</sup> It was situated a few hundred yards away from Holloway Prison on Parkhurst Road. This could be where the children spent time with the family while their mother and father were away, giving an important understanding of the social structure of the early part of Sarah's life.

Sarah's home in Battersea, was modern, smart, and appealed to the middle classes. A search of the census returns for the area revealed that the family's neighbours included bank managers, musicians and lecturers, and many households were complete with a general domestic servant, usually a single woman.<sup>44</sup> The location of the Prince Edward public house was defined by the Charles Booth poverty maps and survey into life and labour in London (1886-1903), as between 'Middle Class, Well-to-Do' and 'Mixed. Some Comfortable Others Poor', the inhabitants tended to be more concerned with trades or were prison warders, with the more affluent inhabitants employing perhaps a cook

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<sup>41</sup> Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* p.95.

<sup>42</sup> Inward Passenger Manifests for Ships and Aircraft arriving at Fremantle, Perth Airport and Western Australian Outports from 1897-1963, Series Number K 269, Reel Number 12, National Archives of Australia [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed September 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Overseers' Returns of Electors, Electoral Registers London, England, Charles Fishwick, Finsbury, St Mary Islington, 1885, MR/PER, L.M.A.; Registrar General, 1891 England Census, Class RG12, Piece 161, Folio 164, p.4, T.N.A.

<sup>44</sup> Registrar General, 1901 England Census, Class RG13, Piece 440, Folio 106, p.38, T.N.A.; Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, Saint Mary, Battersea. P70/MRY2, L.M.A.

and housemaid.<sup>45</sup> However, as publicans, Alice's family did not feature highly in the social strata.<sup>46</sup>

Reunited with their children, Alfred and Alice's life in the theatre continued on their return from the Southern Hemisphere, and here we witness the family make a concerted effort to continue to climb up the social scale through their profession. Alfred sought to reacquaint himself with his network of contacts, and his work with charitable organisations. In early 1904, he was elected to the councils of the Actors Association and the Royal General Theatrical Fund (R.G.T.F.).<sup>47</sup> Charitable work was an inherent part of the theatrical profession at that time. As a man in a prominent position in the business, as well as contributing his time and talent to worthy causes, Alfred would have used his charity work to increase his network of contacts.<sup>48</sup> Catherine Hindson notes:

'Building on a late-eighteenth-century drive by the actor-managers of London's Theatres Royal to provide for those in the industry afflicted by illness or poverty, the theatre industry had become known for its tireless work for a wide range of charity organizations since the mid-nineteenth century.'<sup>49</sup>

Alfred, who had been the director of the R.G.T.F. in 1884, was following his father, who Trewin describes as 'an original member'.<sup>50</sup> The fact that Alfred should choose to become re-involved with these societies so quickly after his return to England, shows a wish to confirm his place in the social and hierarchical nature of the profession, thus improving his, and his family's standing within the public sphere, whilst perhaps partly reflecting the fragile

<sup>45</sup> Charles Booth Online Archive [online] <http://booth.lse.ac.uk> (accessed 27 April 2016); Registrar General, 1901 England Census, Class RG13, Piece 161, Folio 164, p.4, T.N.A.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for control 1830-1885* (London and New York: Routledge 2007) p.28; John Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1830-80* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1983) p.222.

<sup>47</sup> 'Royal General Fund' *The Stage* 31 Mar 1904 p.15.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Hindson, '"Gratuitous Assistance"? The West End Theatre Industry, Late Victorian Charity, and Patterns of Theatrical Fundraising,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 30:1 (February 2014) p.17-28; Tracy C. Davis, 'Victorian Charity and Self-Help for Women Performers,' *Theatre Notebook* 41:3 (1987) pp.97-148; For a comprehensive history of the specific charity see, Wendy Trewin, *The Royal General Theatrical Fund: A History, 1838-1988* (London: Society for Theatre Research 1989).

<sup>49</sup> Hindson, 'Gratuitous Assistance' p.18.

<sup>50</sup> Trewin, *Royal General Theatrical Fund* p.68.

nature of a career in the theatre, where helping today might mean being helped tomorrow.

Later in Sarah's life, she would describe a lifelong interest in Japanese culture, and it is at this juncture that we see the first links with ideas of the 'Orient'. Alfred formed a new company with Harcourt Beatty, with whom he had toured Australia.<sup>51</sup> Viv Gardner describes the early 1900s as 'the so-called heyday of the touring actor-manager', and Alfred and Alice spent the next few years acting and producing, both with their own company and in collaboration with others. They spent much of their time on the south coast of England.<sup>52</sup> Local newspapers of the period indicate that the theatres they were most associated with at this time were the Hastings and St Leonards Pier Pavilion, and the West Pier and Palace Pier at Brighton in Sussex.<sup>53</sup> The West Pier was known for bringing 'Orientalism' to the seaside pier setting.<sup>54</sup> Taking his cue from Nash's Royal Pavilion, also in Brighton, the architect, Eugenius Birch, gave the ironwork an exotic, Eastern feel.<sup>55</sup> Coincidentally, Birch also designed the Hastings Pier Pavilion, taking the Oriental theme even further.<sup>56</sup> These places would have been an integral part of Sarah's childhood and youth, and could potentially have had an effect on her ongoing interest in Eastern culture.

Pier theatres were an inherent part of the provincial theatre industry, utilising the leisure time and disposable income of the holiday makers of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.<sup>57</sup> Hill notes the contribution of the seaside town to the entertainment industry, naming Eastbourne and Brighton amongst the six main tourism employers.<sup>58</sup> Small companies, such as Alfred's, followed the circuit, re-

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<sup>51</sup> 'Brighton' *The Era* 4 June 1904 p.11.

<sup>52</sup> Gardner, 'Provincial Stages' p.62.

<sup>53</sup> Examples include: 'The Palace Pier' *Brighton Gazette* 2 April 1904 p.5; 'A Fine Drama on Hastings Pier' *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* 22 April 1905 p.3; 'Hastings Pier Pavilion' *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* 14 November 1908 p.1.

<sup>54</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 1995) p.93; Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside: Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion Books 2009) p.94.

<sup>55</sup> Gray, *Designing the Seaside* p.94.

<sup>56</sup> Gray, *Designing the Seaside* p.94.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Williams and Alan A. Lew, *Tourism Geography: Critical Understandings of Place, Space and Experience, Third Edition* (London and New York: Routledge 2015) p.39.

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave 2002) p.80.

attending year on year.<sup>59</sup> These seaside theatres are likely to have been a good, regular source of income for the Tappings when they returned from abroad.

The family's socio-economic standing was altering, and just before Alfred and Alice had travelled to Australia, they had moved home. Alice described the fact that they had 'outgrown' the flat in Battersea and moved to a house, five miles out of London, where the children had 'a nice garden and plenty of room to play.'<sup>60</sup> Alfred was listed in *The Era* in September 1904 as being 'at liberty', essentially meaning that he was available for work, and his address for correspondence was listed as 28 Leyland Road, Lee, near Lewisham, a semi-detached house, south east of the city.<sup>61</sup> The 1911 census return, filled in by Alfred, showed that this new house had thirteen rooms, not counting any 'scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor warehouse, office, [or] shop.'<sup>62</sup> Along with the immediate family of Alfred, Alice and the three children, Alice's sister and niece were staying, and two twenty-year-old female servants lived in. This placed the family in a higher social position than before. They had no live-in servants in the 1901 census return. This shows that Sarah's parents could be judged as relatively successful in their profession, although not in the same stratum as actor-managers who owned or leased premises in London, such as Alfred's previous employers, Sir Henry Irving, the first person in the theatrical profession to receive a knighthood, or Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, for whom Alfred had worked at the Haymarket.<sup>63</sup>

During Sarah's childhood, the Tapping family had grown in social and professional stature, and Sarah had been exposed to a life of travel beyond that of most working people. Whether as a participant or vicariously through her parents' experiences at home and abroad, to see the potential of such

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<sup>59</sup> Lynn F. Pearson, *The People's Palaces: The Story of the Seaside Pleasure Buildings of 1870-1914* (Buckingham: Barracuda 1991) p.47; Cyril Bainbridge, *Pavilions on the Sea: A History of the Seaside Pleasure Pier* (London: R Hale 1986) p.182.

<sup>60</sup> 'Miss Alice Farleigh at Home' p.21.

<sup>61</sup> 'Mr A. B. Tapping' *The Era* 10 September 1904 p.5.

<sup>62</sup> 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 2745.

<sup>63</sup> Robertson Davies, 'Irving, Sir Henry (1838-1905)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34116> (accessed December 2017); B. A. Kachur, 'Beerbohm Tree, Sir Herbert (1852-1917)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36549> (accessed December 2017); Hesketh Pearson, *The Last Actor Managers* (London: White Lion Publishers, 1974) pp.55-60 (Irving) and pp.9-22 (Tree).



geographic movement at a young age, not as part of the higher or monied classes, must have influenced her willingness to travel as a solo female later in life. Likewise, her introduction to Orientalism, through fashions, architectural and otherwise, could be considered to have evoked her lifelong interest in Eastern culture.

As Sarah approached her teens, she was introduced to influential members of the women's suffrage movement and she began to shape her own destiny as a young actress and scholar.

### 2.3 Early Theatrical Life 1906 - 1918

This section examines the connections between the theatrical profession and the suffrage campaign through Sarah's early career. This begins the consideration of her place within the gendered political movement as a pioneering sportswoman.

In 1906, at the age of nine, Sarah's career in the theatre began. Her parents had arranged a tour with two plays and both included a young girl in the cast.<sup>64</sup> Coming from an acting family, Sarah was fairly typical of females experiencing inauguration to the stage at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> Based on a sample of 1,133 players, Sanderson shows that between 1890 and 1913, of those who made their debut, 35.4% had parents in theatrical occupations.<sup>66</sup> Booth asserts that 'legions of Victorian actors' were 'born into a theatrical family.'<sup>67</sup>

Sarah's first performance was in *A Man's Shadow* by Robert Buchanan.<sup>68</sup> The *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* wrote:

'The most notable part about the performance on Monday evening was that little Miss Winnie Tapping made her debut. She played the part of

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<sup>64</sup> 'Drama on the Hastings Pier' *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* 7 July 1906 p.2; 'Hastings, Pavilion, St Leonards Pier' *The Stage*, 9 Aug 1906 p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier: A Social History of the Acting Profession in England 1880-1983* (London: Athlone 1984) Appendix 1 – The Social Origins of the Acting Profession in England 1880-1980.

<sup>66</sup> Sanderson, *Irving to Olivier* Appendix 1.

<sup>67</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* p.100.

<sup>68</sup> 'A Man's Shadow,' HBT/000095, Theatre Collection, University of Bristol.

Suzanne ... and she covered herself with glory. She was a picture of daintiness and trusting childhood; her lines were delivered with a clearness and intelligence which is born and not acquired. She has no doubt inherited the talents of her parents and a lustrous future will doubtless fall to her lot.<sup>69</sup>

The other play produced by Alfred that summer was *Masks and Faces*, written in 1852 by Charles Reade and Tom Taylor. *The Stage* gave a nice review of the show, saying that 'Miss Winnie Tapping makes a praiseworthy Roxalana', although it should be noted that the reviewer was a master in the art of the compliment, and all players received flattery.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that Sarah began working so early in her life, invites the question of her schooling, and whether we can view this sporting pioneer as an educated woman. No mention can be found of Sarah in productions between 1907 and 1912. It is feasible that she was sent to school by her father, in the same way that he had sent Sydney his stepdaughter, some twenty years before. Sydney had been dispatched for seven years to a succession of schools both in England and abroad.<sup>71</sup> Another piece of evidence which would point to Sarah being sent to school appeared in Alice's interview of 1902. Whilst talking about how two or three children are 'very little more trouble' than one, she conceded that 'Of course, there is always the expense of education to consider.'<sup>72</sup> Sandra Richards, discussing Edwardian and early twentieth-century actresses, claims that 'An early musical training and a spell in school on the continent also characterized the education of this generation of English actresses.'<sup>73</sup> Sarah stated in an interview in 1934 that she had attended 'a private girls finishing school in Belgium'.<sup>74</sup> This body of evidence would imply that Sarah received a reasonable education, at a time when, as Sheila Fletcher describes, girls were not only being given more access to schooling, but were encouraged to engage

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<sup>69</sup> 'Drama on the Hastings Pier' p.2.

<sup>70</sup> 'Hastings, Pavilion, St Leonards Pier' *The Stage* 9 Aug 1906 p.4.

<sup>71</sup> Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* pp.45 and 94-95.

<sup>72</sup> 'Miss Alice Farleigh at Home' p.21.

<sup>73</sup> Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (London: The Macmillan Press 1993) p.139.

<sup>74</sup> 'Judo is perfect feminine sport says Englishwoman' *Japan Times* 23 September 1934 p.5.

with physical culture.<sup>75</sup> Hargreaves states that ‘Class-related sports participation in adulthood was the result, to a large extent, of experiences at school.<sup>76</sup> Women were even beginning to train in *jūjutsu* at Cambridge.<sup>77</sup> Alongside her later professional learning, Sarah’s education helped her to prepare for different cultural experiences, and the ability to ‘play the part’ in new and alien situations.

It has been difficult to trace where Sarah may have been schooled. The educational facilities which have been identified as attended by Sydney either do not exist now, or do not hold an archive with a record of Sarah. This is a typical problem for historians identified and addressed by Aaron D. Purcell in his work around academic institutions and their archives.<sup>78</sup> What is known, is that the 1911 census return for the family home does not list Sarah amongst the inhabitants. Ostensibly, all this shows is that she was not present in the house on the night of 2 April, however a comprehensive search of the 1911 census returns for England and Wales brought no record of Sarah under the names Winifred, Winnie or Sarah Tapping.<sup>79</sup> This could be due to her removal abroad as a scholar or, it could potentially result from an early interest in the women’s suffrage movement relating to research carried out by Elizabeth Crawford and Jill Liddington.<sup>80</sup>

When the 1911 census was released for public view in 2009, in an article for the Office for National Statistics, Ian White explained the background of the census and the threatened Suffragette boycott.<sup>81</sup> Many followers refused to be listed as non-voters; for example, actress and producer Lillah McCarthy, who was to employ Sarah in 1914, vetoed the form, although her husband, Harley Granville

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<sup>75</sup> Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880-1980* (London: The Athlone Press 1984).

<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women’s Sports* (London: Routledge 1994) p.120.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Ju-Jitsu’ *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 30 December 1905 p.423

<sup>78</sup> Aaron D. Purcell, *Academic Archives: Managing the Next Generation of College and University Archives, Records, and Special Collections* (Chicago: ALA Neal Schuman 2012); Also see, Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge Falmer 2004).

<sup>79</sup> Registrar General, 1911 Census Returns for England and Wales, RG14, T.N.A.

<sup>80</sup> Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford, ‘Women Do Not Count, Neither Shall They Be Counted: Suffrage, Citizenship and the Battle for the 1911 Census,’ *History Workshop Journal* 71:1 (2011) pp.98-127; Jill Liddington, *Vanishing for the Vote* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2014).

<sup>81</sup> Ian White, *No vote – No Census: An Account of Some of the Events of 1910–1911* [online] [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk) (accessed April 2016).

Barker completed it in her absence.<sup>82</sup> However, Sarah was only fourteen years old in 1911, so involvement in the campaign seems a little unlikely, even though her father was working with strong supporters of women's suffrage at the time.<sup>83</sup> If she was not away at school, it could be surmised that she had a close link to the women's movement, and therefore a possible motive for exclusion from the household schedules.

Sarah's reappearance on record came in September 1913 at the age of sixteen, when she was employed as a supporting actress.<sup>84</sup> Women in the theatre were no longer in the minority; Davis writes that census returns for England and Wales show that since 1881, women had outnumbered men in terms of members of the acting profession.<sup>85</sup> For 1841, she shows just 310 women listed as actors compared to 1,153 men, increasing by over 100% in the next ten years and rising steadily until 1881. By 1911, two years before Sarah's first known adult employment, Davis displays a fairly even split with 9,171 women to 9,076 men. Lawton, however, in *Census and Social Structure* gives overall figures for actors as rising from 2,180 in 1881 to 9,002 in 1911, with no given split for men and women.<sup>86</sup> Davis' work agrees with the statistical analysis of the 1911 England and Wales Census in the census reports from 1913/14.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, of all the arts listed within the reports under the occupational section 'Art, Music, Drama etc.', acting and music are the professions where women outnumber men, with the visual arts, i.e. painters, sculptors, artists, photographers, showing 19,316 males against 9,218 females.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, even before the First World War, in terms of women's employment, Sarah was in a profession where women had gained an equal footing in numerical terms.

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<sup>82</sup> Registrar General, 1911 Census, Class RG14, Piece 3988, Schedule 95, T.N.A.

<sup>83</sup> Records have been found in J. P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1910-1919* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2013) of Alfred working with The New Players; The Pioneer Players; and for Barker and McCarthy at the Little Theatre, and Sarah was herself, later, to work for leading theatrical supporters of women's suffrage, Barker and McCarthy.

<sup>84</sup> 'London & Suburban Theatres: The Marlborough' *The Era* 24 September 1913 p.20.

<sup>85</sup> Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* p.10.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Lawton (ed), *Census and Social Structure: An interpretive Guide to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Censuses for England and Wales* (Abingdon and New York: Frank Casson 1978) p.272.

<sup>87</sup> Registrar General, 'Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911, giving details of Areas, Houses, Families or separate occupiers, and Population: Occupations and Industries, Part I,' from Great Britain Historical G.I.S. Project (2017) 'Great Britain Historical G.I.S.,' University of Portsmouth [online] <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>88</sup> Registrar General, 'Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911' <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>.

Acting was a perilous profession for a single woman to be entering however, and the 'casting couch' was a reality for many young actresses.<sup>89</sup> Kitty Marion, actress and later prominent member of the W.S.P.U., and a birth control activist, 'determined that somehow' she would 'fight this vile, economic and sex domination over women which has no right to be, and which no man or woman worthy of the term should tolerate.'<sup>90</sup> With Sarah's familial connections within the theatre, it could be assumed that she managed to bypass these hazards, perhaps allowing for a degree of naïveté to continue through her adult life.

Despite this naïveté, Sarah would later show a degree of feminism in her attitudes and agency. To understand the construction of this gendered outlook, it is useful to look for links during her early life to the first wave of the women's movement. The first confirmed direct contact Sarah had with such women came through her employment outside of the family. Alfred's former colleague, Ethel Warwick, cast Sarah as Divonne in *Zaza* at The Marlborough Theatre in London.<sup>91</sup> In April 1913, Warwick had become the new, although short lived, manager of The Little Theatre in London, reportedly one of only six women managing London theatres at the time.<sup>92</sup> Warwick was a prominent member of the Actresses Franchise League (A.F.L.). The policy of the league was to support all suffrage groups, and as Holledge argues, while it did not advocate acts of violence to promote the cause, a lack of condemnation showed a passive endorsement.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, Paxton shows that the A.F.L. was involved in the promotion of *jūjutsu* to women who engaged with the movement.<sup>94</sup>

Translated from the French play by Pierre Berton and Charles Simon, although a comedy, *Zaza* was a gritty realistic piece.<sup>95</sup> When *Zaza* first appeared in

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<sup>89</sup> McDonald, 'Lesser Ladies' p.234.

<sup>90</sup> For General biography of Marion see Viv Gardner, 'Marion, Kitty (1871-1944) Suffragette and Birth Control Activist,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004); Kitty Marion, 'Kitty Marion Papers,' New York Public Library, p.73, quoted in Woodworth, 'Luggage, Lodgings, and Landladies' p.26.

<sup>91</sup> 'London & Suburban Theatres: The Marlborough' *The Era* 24 September 1913 p.20.

<sup>92</sup> 'Miss Ethel Irving' *Sunday Times* (Sydney, N.S.W.) 11 May 1913 p.24 [online] <https://trove.nla.gov.au> (accessed January 2018).

<sup>93</sup> Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press 1981) pp.50-53.

<sup>94</sup> Naomi Paxton, *Stage Rights!: The Actresses' Franchise League, Activism and Politics 1908-58* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2018) p.38.

<sup>95</sup> Katie N. Johnson, 'Zaza: That "Obtruding Harlot" of the Stage,' *Theatre Journal* 54:2 (2002) pp.223-243.

Britain thirteen years earlier in 1900, the press wrote scathing reviews about its coarseness and indelicate nature.<sup>96</sup> It was quite shocking in its realism and language, showing the life of an unfortunate young woman who finds herself on the streets as a child, and becomes notorious through her talents on the music hall stage.<sup>97</sup> One can only conclude that in the next thirteen years, audiences had grown accustomed to such authenticity. This time the public and the press appear to have enjoyed it immensely. Sarah herself received a nice review in *The Era*: 'No small amount of amusement is caused by Miss Winifred Tapping ... as housekeeper ... to Mme. Dufresne.'<sup>98</sup> This seemingly unimportant statement and the role she played, nevertheless provides this thesis with a valuable view of Sarah, as a comedienne, able to make others laugh, and perhaps relax in her company, and it is with this knowledge that we begin to understand the woman who charmed the Japanese establishment on her later trip.

The evidence shows that, in Sarah's first paid employment, she was acting in a play which audiences had previously found shocking and inappropriate, employed by a woman deeply involved with politicised theatre and activism. It is difficult to imagine that she would not have been influenced by these experiences.

Connection to the suffrage movement continued for Sarah, and with it, an awareness of the Japanese martial arts. In May, Alfred was appearing in a play with women's suffrage supporters, the Pioneer Players at The Little Theatre.<sup>99</sup> It is not known whether the Tapping family engaged with the suffrage movement in their private lives, for instance, no record has been found of either Alice or Sarah in the papers of the A.F.L. held at the Women's Library, L.S.E., but professionally they were deeply involved.<sup>100</sup> The Pioneer Players, with whom Alfred was working, were a theatre 'society' founded by Edith Craig, a well-

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<sup>96</sup> 'London Theatrical News' *New York Times* 22 April 1900 [online] [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) (accessed 27 April 2016).

<sup>97</sup> Johnson, 'Zaza' pp.223-243.

<sup>98</sup> 'London & Suburban Theatres' p.20.

<sup>99</sup> James Robert Geddis (ed), 'Dramatic and Musical' *Free Lance* Volume XIII Issue 676 (14 June 1913) p.7; Wearing, *The London Stage 1910-1919*, 13.140.

<sup>100</sup> Records of the Actresses' Franchise League (1909-1916) 1990/NoAccNo05, NA467, 2AFL, The Women's Library, London School of Economics.

known figure in the history of the women's movement.<sup>101</sup> She was the daughter of Ellen Terry, possibly the most famous female on the nineteenth-century British stage.<sup>102</sup> An article in *The Dundee Courier* in 1909 said Craig was to be head of a fair held by the Women's Freedom League, at which there would be a mock suffrage meeting held, and women trained in *jūjutsu* would be attacked by men.<sup>103</sup> The Pioneer Players support for the women's movement not only concentrated on works concerned with women's and other political issues, but also promoted female playwrights, presenting mostly single performances of works in available venues.<sup>104</sup> In Katherine Cockin's seminal work on the Society, she explains the difficulty in defining their output:

'specifically because it was an organisation committed to change, to promoting social change and to responding to it, by engaging with controversial current events such as court cases, political campaigns and new legislation.'<sup>105</sup>

Many members of the theatrical profession became supporters of the suffrage cause, and various societies were formed as well as the Pioneer Players. These included the Play Actors Company, Propaganda Players, and New Players. Managers of theatrical spaces supported these groups by allowing the use of their stages, whilst actors and production crews gave their time and expertise.<sup>106</sup> Alfred was used by many of these societies as an actor and/or Stage Manager, and was therefore publicly showing his backing for the

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<sup>101</sup> Katharine Cockin, 'Craig, Edith Ailsa Geraldine (1869–1947)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, first published 2004; online edition Sept 2015) [online] <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39083>.

<sup>102</sup> Information on the mother and daughter can be found at Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database: Ellen Terry Archive [online] <http://www.ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk> (accessed 27 April 2016).

<sup>103</sup> 'Suffragettes Learn Ju-Jitsu' *Dundee Courier*, 12 April 1909 p.6.

<sup>104</sup> Cockin, *Women and Theatre* p.6.

<sup>105</sup> Cockin, *Women and Theatre* p.10.

<sup>106</sup> For works on theatrical societies supporting women's suffrage see, Carolyn Tilghman, 'Staging Suffrage: Women, Politics, and the Edwardian Theater [sic],' *Comparative Drama* 45:4 (Winter 2011) pp.339-360; Rebecca Cameron, '"A somber passion strengthens her voice": The Stage as Public Platform in British Women's Suffrage Drama,' *Comparative Drama* 50:4 (2016) pp.293-433; Susan Carlson, 'Comic Militancy: The Politics of Suffrage Drama,' in Maggie B. Gale & Viv Gardner (eds), *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000) pp.198-215; Katharine Cockin, 'Cicely Hamilton's Warriors: Dramatic Reinventions of Militancy in the British Women's Suffrage Movement,' *Women's History Review* 14:3&4 (2005) pp.527-542.

women's movement, an important factor in this thesis, considering Sarah's motivations for her later pioneering interests.<sup>107</sup>

In the same year that Sarah had her first adult role, Alfred was working for his previous employer, by now an eminent director and producer, Harley Granville Barker, in his production of George Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*. Barker had, in the interim, become associated with Shaw, which has become a well-documented affiliation, although Dymkowski considers the relationship to be more 'symbiotic' than prodigal, as, before Barker and Vedrenne's 1904-1907 season at The Court, 'Shaw was a published, but hardly performed playwright.'<sup>108</sup> Eric Salmon enjoys the idea of Shaw and Barker as father and son, with his evidence '[indicating] a possibility' of their familial connection.<sup>109</sup> Later commentators, however, have taken a more sceptical view. For instance, Richard Eyre, in his foreword to Barker's preface to *Anthony and Cleopatra*, describes the rumour of a father-son relationship as a 'myth.'<sup>110</sup>

Whatever the details of Shaw and Barker's relationship, the connection between the two highly influential men of the theatre, and the Tapping family, was to have a continued effect throughout Sarah's life, and in February 1914, a year after her father, Sarah was also working for Harley Granville Barker and Lillah McCarthy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as part of their ground-breaking series of Shakespeare plays at The Savoy theatre.<sup>111</sup>

This seemingly minor connection to the Barkers in Sarah's youth is nonetheless of great significance to this thesis, placing her once again directly into a politicised sphere, supporting the women's suffrage movement, while giving her a personal connection to some of the most important players in modern theatre history.

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<sup>107</sup> Records have been found of Alfred working with The New Players, The Pioneer Players, and for Barker and McCarthy at the Little Theatre, in Wearing, *The London Stage 1910-1919*.

<sup>108</sup> Christine Dymkowski, *Harley Granville Barker: A Preface to Modern Shakespeare* (London: Associated University Presses 1986) p.32; Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: A Biography* (London: Vintage 1998) pp.308-309; Lawrence Switzky, 'Shaw Among the Modernists,' *Shaw The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 31 (2011) pp. 133-148.

<sup>109</sup> Eric Salmon, *Granville Barker, A Secret Life* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1984).

<sup>110</sup> Richard Eyre (foreword), in Harley Granville Barker, *Granville-Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare: Anthony and Cleopatra* (London: Nick Hearn Books, Royal National Theatre [jointly] 1993) p.iv.

<sup>111</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1910-1919* 14.27.



Along with *The Winter's Tale* and *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was controversial in its design and staging, causing much discussion by critics.<sup>112</sup> Dymkowski sums up the contribution by Barker to the modernisation of British theatre through his Shakespearian work:

'The supremacy of the text, the break from realistic illusion, the freedom from restrictions of historical setting, the need for continuous playing, the emphasis on theme, the concern to present Shakespeare's essentials in a manner sympathetic to the modern imagination – all these requirements were first posited by Barker.'<sup>113</sup>

The *Dream* ran from February to May 1914 and as a member of the chorus, Sarah became part of a landmark moment in British theatre history.<sup>114</sup> However, the research shows that this employment would also plunge Sarah directly into the realm of gendered politicisation. Carlson promotes Granville Barker as a political activist, asserting that that the Shakespearian series of 1912-1914,

'should be understood with a focus on the issues of community and gender implied in his activist connections. Indeed, the incredible energy of the Savoy productions may spring centrally from the politics he, his wife Lillah McCarthy, and their co-workers experienced on the raucous, politicized streets of London before the First World War.'<sup>115</sup>

Combined with Alfred's work for the women's suffrage movement, this is compelling evidence of Sarah's political awareness and suffrage connections in the pre-First World War period, despite her young age.

The end of the *Dream* came just two months before hostilities of The Great War commenced in July 1914. Theatre, like many leisure activities, was greatly affected with the announcement of war.<sup>116</sup> The Tapping family relied entirely on

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<sup>112</sup> C. B. Purdom, *Harley Granville Barker: Man of the Theatre, Dramatist and Scholar* (London: Rockliff 1955) p.149; Charles M. Barbour, 'Up against a Symbolic Painted Cloth: "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Savoy, 1914,' *Educational Theatre Journal* 27:4 (1975) pp.521-52; Joseph Falocco, "'We Shall Not Save Our Souls by Being Elizabethan",' *New England Theatre Journal* 18 (2007) pp.27-48; Harley Granville Barker Archive (addition) 1912-1915, Theatre and Performance Collection, GB71/THM/320, The Victoria and Albert Museum, UK.

<sup>113</sup> Dymkowski, *Harley Granville Barker* p.82.

<sup>114</sup> Barbour, 'Up against a Symbolic Painted Cloth' pp.521-52; Falocco, 'We Shall Not Save Our Souls' pp.27-48.

<sup>115</sup> Carlson, 'Politicizing Harley Granville Barker' abstract.

<sup>116</sup> L. J. Collins, *Theatre at War 1914-1918* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd 1998) p.2.

the stage for their income, and a cessation of theatrical entertainments would have been catastrophic.

According to Michael Sanderson, when the season in London restarted after the summer break, the realisation that the war was not going to be the brief victorious endeavour previously anticipated, meant that audience turn outs were extremely low, and two hundred touring companies ceased to work.<sup>117</sup> L. J. Collins describes 'an initial hiatus, and tentative period of readjustment'.<sup>118</sup> But soon, the theatrical profession was called upon to produce morale boosting entertainment, and former prejudice and abstinence was replaced by an almost patriotic attendance, meaning a reprieve for the family from penury.<sup>119</sup>

In October 1914, not conforming to the mass closure of travelling companies, Sarah was on tour under the name of Benedicta Tapping. She appeared in *The Milestones* as Muriel Pym, for Vedrenne and Eadie's company.<sup>120</sup> This job was likely to have come about through Alfred's connections with John Eugene Vedrenne, a man with slicked down short hair, steel rimmed round spectacles, and an impressive moustache, who in turn was an associate of Granville Barker.<sup>121</sup> Research through the Budokwai archives also shows that Vedrenne's son would later be a judo contemporary of Sarah's at the Society.

With Sarah's employment in *Milestones*, her celebrity and social standing would rise. Davis has shown that before the tour, *The Milestones* was the largest success the producers had seen at The Royalty Theatre, running for seventy-seven weeks in 1912.<sup>122</sup> Allardyce Nicoll notes a run of 607 performances starring Gladys Cooper, one of the great beauties of the age, in the role of Muriel.<sup>123</sup> The production subsequently went on tour twice, and Sarah seems to have been in a short section of the first tour, appearing on the records in Bristol, Worcester and Preston in October and at The Coronet Theatre in London in

<sup>117</sup> Sanderson, *Irving to Olivier* p.161.

<sup>118</sup> Collins, *Theatre at War* p.2.

<sup>119</sup> Gordon Williams, *British Theatre in the Great War: A Revaluation (1)* (London: Continuum 2003) pp.147-199.

<sup>120</sup> 'Milestones' *Clifton Society* 1 October 1914 p.8; 'Worcester' *The Stage* 8 Oct 1914 p.23.

<sup>121</sup> Anthony Jackson, 'First steps: The Beginnings of a Movement,' in George Rowell and Anthony Jackson (eds), *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984) pp.16-34.

<sup>122</sup> Davis, *Economics of the British Stage* pp.219-220.

<sup>123</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *English Drama 1900-1930: The Beginnings of the Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973) p.388.

November.<sup>124</sup> At the end of November however, the show was in Leeds without Sarah.<sup>125</sup>

The Honourable Muriel Pym is described in the stage directions as, 'a handsome girl of twenty-four, rather thin and eager, with a high forehead and much distinction. She has herself under absolute control.'<sup>126</sup> Sarah had just turned eighteen when she undertook this role. Muriel was a young woman, highly influenced by the women's suffrage movement, who had become engaged to be married without her parents' knowledge and was planning to leave the country with her new husband to spend their lives in Canada.<sup>127</sup> Her family disapproved of the match; she was an aristocrat and he an engineer.<sup>128</sup> This role gives an indication of the casting type that Sarah was suited to, even if her father was calling in favours to secure the job. The review from *The Stage* stated: 'Miss Benedicta Tapping conveys admirably the advanced Muriel Pym'; while the Preston Herald enthused that she 'combines the charm and the most businesslike style of the modern girl.'<sup>129</sup> A quality which would later come to impact on her time in Japan

Although Sarah was performing in established productions, it would seem that her professional education was not yet complete, and in March 1915, she was to be found under the name of Miss W. Benedict Tapping, in *The Green Cockatoo* performed by The Academy of Dramatic Art, later to become known as R.A.D.A.<sup>130</sup> The Academy was founded in 1904 by Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Alfred's previous employer.<sup>131</sup> Gillian Sutherland describes membership of the Academy for young women as '[carrying] the seeds of enhanced status' and

<sup>124</sup> 'Milestones at the Prince's Theatre' Western Daily Press 29 September 1914 p.3; 'Worcester' p.23; 'The Coronet, W.' *The Stage* 12 Nov 1914 p.18.

<sup>125</sup> Leeds Playbills [online] [http://www.leodis.net/playbills/item.asp?ri=2003314\\_44463748#](http://www.leodis.net/playbills/item.asp?ri=2003314_44463748#) (accessed April 2016).

<sup>126</sup> Arnold Bennett & Edward Knoblauch, *Milestones, A Play in Three Acts* (New York: George H. Doran Company 1912) [online] <https://archive.org/details/milestonesplayin01benn> (accessed April 2016).

<sup>127</sup> Bennett and Knoblauch, *Milestones*.

<sup>128</sup> Registrar General, 1861 Census Return, England and Wales, Class RG9, Piece 800, Folio 49, p.4, T.N.A.

<sup>129</sup> 'Worcester' p.23; 'The Theatre Royal, Preston' *Preston Herald* 21 October 1914 p.2.

<sup>130</sup> 'Academy of Dramatic Art' *The Stage*, 1 April 1915 p.20.

<sup>131</sup> Hesketh Pearson, *Beerbohm Tree: His Life and Laughter* (London: Greenwood Press 1956) p.165. Examples of Alfred listed as Stage Manager at The Haymarket in 1889-1890 'Mr A. B. Tapping' *The Era* 19 October 1889 p.6; 'Mr A. B. Tapping' *The Era* 25 January 1890 p.7; In 1891, the listing changed to 'Late Stage Manager, Haymarket Theatre' for example 'Mr A. B. Tapping' *The Era* 25 July 1891 p.6.

helping to dispel the idea of the actress as ‘*fille de joie*, a superior prostitute.’<sup>132</sup> There are no enrolment lists present in the archived records at R.A.D.A. for the period between 1907 and 1919, however the records show that Sarrah [sic] Benedict enrolled later in 1920, and there is some evidence, discussed subsequently, that this was a re-enrolment.<sup>133</sup> Shaw and Barker were both lecturers at the Academy. We can gain an understanding of the skills Sarah was developing as an actress, which would likely have impacted on her later judo abilities and trip abroad, from *The Stage Year Book* for 1915:

‘The training consists of voice production, elocution, Delsarte gesture, dancing, fencing, rehearsal classes; also lectures on subjects connected with the drama and French diction (optional).’

‘The ordinary course takes four terms, but students can enter for a single term. The fee per term is £12 12s., and the entrance fee £1 1s. The French diction classes are £1 1s. extra for regular students.’<sup>134</sup>

These were traditional techniques and not insubstantial fees. During 1915 there were approximately ninety students at the Academy, and *The Green Cockatoo* was one of several pieces shown at Wyndham’s Theatre in central London.<sup>135</sup> The correspondent covering the event for *The Stage* described it as ‘an exceedingly long and varied afternoon’. His review of Sarah was non-committal, and after a glowing description of some of her fellow students, she came under the description of ‘Others more or less to be commended’.<sup>136</sup>

The war was having a notable effect however, not just on audiences, but on the profession itself, particularly the younger members. *The People* noted how the cast of the Academy show in 1915 was almost exclusively female, with the majority of the male students away at war.<sup>137</sup> Although conscription was not introduced until January 1916, there was, as Collins puts it, ‘also coercive pressure to enlist which came from differing quarters ... and in the case of

<sup>132</sup> Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle Class Women and Work in Britain 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015) p.61.

<sup>133</sup> Sarrah [sic] Benedict, Enrolment Lists, Library and Archive, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London, UK.

<sup>134</sup> L. Carson (ed), *The Stage Year Book 1914* (London: Carson and Comerford 1915) p.76.

<sup>135</sup> L. Carson (ed), *The Stage Year Book 1915* (London: Carson and Comerford 1916) p.84.

<sup>136</sup> ‘Academy of Dramatic Art’ *The Stage*, 1 April 1915 p.20.

<sup>137</sup> ‘It says much for the Excellence’ *The People* 4 April 1915 p.4.

actors and artists – from some theatre managers.<sup>138</sup> Young actors and theatre workers were being encouraged to join up, as casualty figures grew.

In spite of the dangers of wartime travel, the following year Sarah showed the adventurous spirit that would be necessary for her later trip, and was to be found using her French language skills, performing in Paris in February 1916 for Max Dearly, as ‘the white feather giving flapper’.<sup>139</sup> As the war years continued, and towards the end of 1916, she had her first named role in the West End with *Misleading Lady*, produced by George Grossmith Jr. and Edward Laurillard at the Playhouse.<sup>140</sup> The lead was taken by Gladys Cooper, the original beauty from *Milestones* two years previously, and the leading man was Weedon Grossmith. Weedon, the uncle of George, was a well-known actor, and famed for writing the comic novel *Diary of a Nobody*, with his brother, also named George.<sup>141</sup> This was a well-known cast, situating Sarah in a different strata of theatre hierarchy, and perhaps a new social sphere. On 19 November 1916, Sarah’s photograph appeared in *The Sunday Mirror* with the caption ‘Miss Sarah Benedict, now appearing in “The Misleading Lady”’, indicating that she had achieved a certain degree of celebrity by the age of twenty-one.<sup>142</sup> The show ran until the end of March 1917, with over two hundred performances through the seven months, and Sarah continued to be featured in advertisements for the show for the length of the run.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Collins, *Theatre at War* p.6.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Transformed City’ *Daily Express* 2 February 1916 p.4.

<sup>140</sup> ‘The Misleading Lady’ *The Era* 13 September 1916 p.1; Photograph Files, *The Misleading Lady*, The Playhouse, 1916, Theatre and Performance Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>141</sup> Tony Joseph, ‘Grossmith, (Walter) Weedon (1854–1919), Artist and Actor,’ in ‘Grossmith, George (1847–1912), Entertainer and Author,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

<sup>142</sup> ‘Miss Sarah Benedict’ *Sunday Mirror* 19 November 1916 p.7.

<sup>143</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1910-1919* 16.167; the first notice found of Sarah in *Misleading Lady* is ‘The Misleading Lady’ *The Era* 13 September 1916 p.1; the last notice is ‘The Misleading Lady’ *The Era* 14 March 1917 p.12.



4. 'Miss Sarah Benedict' *Sunday Mirror* 19 November 1916

Despite the success of *Misleading Lady*, Sarah's continuing engagement in the profession through wartime was to prove both a precarious form of work and physically dangerous. With the advent of Zeppelin bombing raids, the war soon began to affect daily life in London, as theatres with which Sarah and her family were associated were hit,<sup>144</sup> along with three houses which were demolished just 1200 metres away from their home, killing five women and ten children.<sup>145</sup>

The uncertain nature of wartime and Sarah's chosen profession are evident, with no further mention of her employment found in the records before war ended in November 1918. Although Sarah had made a promising start with her career on the stage - with two West End appearances and a tour – a new source of income was needed, and for the time being, her theatrical ambitions were put on hold as she entered a new, albeit brief, chapter of her life.

## 2.4 A Brief Marriage 1919 - 1920

On 29 January 1919, just two months after the end of the First World War, Sarah married her first husband Sills Keith Gibbons.<sup>146</sup> The wedding took place at the register office of St Martin, in London. Sills' sister Beryl (who went on to

<sup>144</sup> Ian Castle, *Zeppelin Menace: London 1914-17* (Oxford: Osprey 2008) pp.40-46.

<sup>145</sup> Castle, *Zeppelin Menace* p.87; Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the First World War: The Complete History* (London: Routledge 1994) pp.58 and 68.

<sup>146</sup> Marriage Certificate, Sills Keith Gibbons and Sarah Winifred Benedict Tapping, St Martin, 29 January 1919, 1a:1163, G.R.O.

marry British racing car driver Noel Van Raalte) was one of the witnesses.<sup>147</sup> To determine the social standing of the family with which Sarah found herself connected, it is important to briefly illustrate Sills Keith's own family background.

Sills was the son of dental surgeon Sills Clifford Gibbons, but the family wealth was such that they lived in a very large country estate for a time, called Great Walstead, in Sussex, now the location of an independent school.<sup>148</sup> Descended from the same family as Sir Sills John Gibbons, Lord Mayor of London in 1871, Sills Keith's direct descendancy was through the Gibbons ironmongers of Kent. His father's first wife was Martha Wilcher, an American, whom, according to genealogical information from the Paget family tree, he met in the US.<sup>149</sup> Using the census returns between 1861 and 1881, it was found that Sills Clifford and Martha had several children.<sup>150</sup> A year after Martha's death in 1889, Sills Clifford married Beatrice Helen Sargeant, who was around thirty two years his junior.<sup>151</sup> The 1891 census return shows that she had moved into the household of four daughters and eight servants at the age of twenty five; the eldest daughter was twenty three and the youngest eight.<sup>152</sup> Beatrice soon had children of her own, and her first, born in 1891, was Sills Keith.<sup>153</sup>

At around the age of fifteen, Sills took his first term at Harrow, one of the most prestigious schools in the country.<sup>154</sup> Attending at the same time as Sills, and staying in the same boarding house, was Jawaharlal Nehru, later to become the first Prime Minister of India.<sup>155</sup> Sills was at Harrow for just over two years. This

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<sup>147</sup> 'Mr Van Raalte Weds in Edinburgh' *The Dundee Courier* 29 December 1920 p.3.

<sup>148</sup> Great Walstead School [online] <http://www.greatwalstead.co.uk/> (accessed January 2018).

<sup>149</sup> Paget Family Pedigree, Sills Clifford Gibbons [online]

[http://anatpro.com/index\\_files/Sills\\_Clifford\\_Gibbons.htm](http://anatpro.com/index_files/Sills_Clifford_Gibbons.htm) (accessed January 2018).

<sup>150</sup> Census Returns for the couple in 1861, 1871, 1881 give evidence of ten different children, see Registrar General, 1861 England Census, Class RG9, Piece 791, Folio 73, p.18; 1871 England Census, Class RG10, Piece 1072, Folio 12, p.18; 1881 England Census, Class RG11, Piece 1061, Folio 52, p.23; all at T.N.A.

<sup>151</sup> Marriage Register Index, Sills Clifford Gibbons and Beatrice Helen M. Sargeant, London, September Quarter, 1890, 1a 275, G.R.O.

<sup>152</sup> Registrar General, 1891 England Census, Class RG12, Piece 791, Folio 37, p.4, T.N.A.

<sup>153</sup> Birth Register Index, Sills Keith Gibbons, Cuckfield, September Quarter, 1891, 2b:157, G.R.O.

<sup>154</sup> M. G. Daughish and P. K. Stevenson (eds), *Harrow School Register, 1800-1911* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1911) p.857 [online] <https://archive.org/details/harrowschoolregi00harruoft> (accessed May 2016).

<sup>155</sup> Daughish and Stevenson, *Harrow School Register, 1800-1911* p.859; Photographs of Headmaster's House, c.1907, currently uncatalogued, Harrow School Archive.

indicates the much higher socio-economic group with which Sarah was now linked.

Sarah and Sills' marriage certificate gave his occupation as a 'Timber Merchant', however the majority of other records found, including the 1911 census, some eight years before he married Sarah, show that he worked in stocks and shares for most of his life.<sup>156</sup> Kelly's Directories held at the West Sussex Record Office fail to show any timber merchants with Sills' name related in either the Brighton area - which later bankruptcy records in the London Gazette show was his business address - or the Lindfield or Scaynes Hill area where the family lived. However, it must be noted that in the records held between 1910 and 1920, the only volumes available were from 1913, 1915, and 1918.<sup>157</sup>

In April 1916, Sills appeared in *The Police Gazette* within a record of men listed as 'Absentees under the Group System'.<sup>158</sup> This system put men into different sets according to their age or marital status, and therefore their eligibility for conscription.<sup>159</sup> Each group would be called up together. *The Police Gazette* list showed men 'who, having failed to report themselves on being called up on permanent service, are therefore absentees.' It gave Sills' occupation as a 'Clerk', of Charing Cross Mansions, London, and stated that he neglected to attend his call up in Brighton on 23 March. There have been no further documents found which relate to his involvement in the Great War, but it is possible that his profession of timber merchant, having reserved occupation status, meant that he would subsequently, therefore, have become exempt from conscription.<sup>160</sup>

Juliette Pattinson describing the concept of the 'soldier hero' tells how 'Those who did not serve in the armed forces were, by implication, considered lesser

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<sup>156</sup> Marriage Certificate, Sills Keith Gibbons and Sarah Winifred Benedict Tapping; For Sills' occupation see for example 'City News in Brief' *The Times* 3 October 1939 p.13; Sills' occupation is 'Stock Broker' on his son Michael Keith's birth certificate - Birth Certificate, Michael Keith Gibbons, North east Fulham, 2 June 1922, 1a:441, G.R.O.

<sup>157</sup> Kelly's Directories, LIB/2357-2360, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, UK.

<sup>158</sup> 'Absentees under the Group System' *Police Gazette* 18 April 1916 p.12.

<sup>159</sup> War Office, *Notes on the Administration of the Group System* (London: H. M. Stationery Office 1915); Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge 2005) p.54.

<sup>160</sup> 'Protected Men' *The Times* 2 May 1917 p. 6.



men.’<sup>161</sup> However, she quotes Ian Beckett’s statistic: ‘53.8 per cent of English and Welsh males aged between fifteen and forty-nine did not serve in the forces in the First World War.’<sup>162</sup> Many of these men were in ‘protected’ work. In 1917 *The Times* included ‘Building, Woodworking and Allied Trades’ as ‘scheduled occupations’.<sup>163</sup> There was often an age limit within reserved occupations, below which men could still be called up.<sup>164</sup> By 1917 Sills was twenty-five or six, and generally, upper age limits were around nineteen to twenty-one, so it seems likely, in conjunction with the lack of records found, that he did not participate in wartime action.

With war at an end in 1919, and Sills and Sarah married, the subsequent divorce papers state that the couple had lived together in ‘The Vicarage’ in Lindfield, Sussex, near to his family.<sup>165</sup> This choice of husband for Sarah was increasing her social position, from the child of moderately successful actors, into a family which could best be described as *haut monde*. Not aristocratic, (although at least one of Sills’ siblings would marry into the aristocracy) Sills’ father was listed in *Kelly’s Directory* as one of the five principal landowners in the Lindfield area throughout the second decade of the twentieth century.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the social climb Sarah was experiencing through this marriage, her character was soon to be called into question. Within the first year of their marriage, Sills and Sarah’s relationship had deteriorated, and he had conceived a baby with another woman.<sup>167</sup> A further event revealed by the research, was a court case brought by Harrods, the department store, against Sarah in September 1919.<sup>168</sup> This provides some evidence, not only of the brevity and animosity within this marriage, but also of the damage caused to Sarah’s reputation. The court minutes have not survived, and only the record of the case

<sup>161</sup> Juliette Pattinson, ‘“Shirkers”, “Scrimjacks” and “Scrimshanks”? British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914–45,’ *Gender & History* 28:3 (November 2016) pp.709-710.

<sup>162</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, *A Nation in Arms: A Social History of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985) p. 11, in Pattinson ‘Shirkers’ p.710.

<sup>163</sup> ‘Protected Men’ p. 6.

<sup>164</sup> Pattinson, ‘Shirkers’ p.713.

<sup>165</sup> Divorce Papers for Sills Keith Gibbons and Sarah Winifred Gibbons, 1922, J77/1921/87, T.N.A.

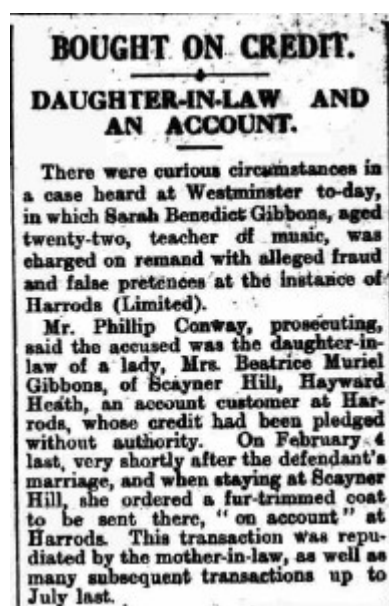
<sup>166</sup> Sills’ sister Sybil married three Baronets, see - Charles Mosley (ed), *Burkes Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage 107<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Delaware, USA: Burke’s Peerage (Genealogical Books) Ltd. 2003) p.3696; For Sills Clifford Gibbons as landowner see for example, *Kelly’s Directory of Sussex 1911*, p.506; *Kelly’s Directory of Sussex 1915*, p.502.

<sup>167</sup> Birth Register Index, Elizabeth B. Gibbons, Kensington, June quarter 1920, 1a:259, G.R.O.

<sup>168</sup> County of London Sessions, 1<sup>st</sup> Court Book, No.16, p.264, ILS/B/03, L.M.A.

in the court books remains at the London Metropolitan Archives, however, newspaper reports give an insight into the proceedings.

On 25 September, the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran a piece almost half a column long on page two, covering the initial hearing. She was described as Sarah Benedict Gibbons, aged twenty-two, and a teacher of music, although later reports described her as a dance teacher. The report stated that she was ‘charged on remand with alleged fraud and false pretences at the instance of Harrods (Limited).’<sup>169</sup>



5. 'Bought on Credit' *Pall Mall Gazette* 25 September 1919.

The prosecutor said that Sarah was the daughter-in-law of Beatrice Gibbons of Scaynes Hill, 'whose credit had been pledged without authority.' The report went on:

‘On February 4 last, very shortly after the defendant’s marriage, and when staying at Scaynes Hill, she ordered a fur trimmed coat to be sent there, “on account” at Harrods. This transaction was repudiated by the mother-in-law, as well as many subsequent transactions up to July last.’<sup>170</sup>

Mrs. Gibbons senior was cross examined, and the *Gazette* reported her replies.

<sup>169</sup> 'Bought on Credit' *Pall Mall Gazette* 25 September 1919 p.2; 'Bride and her Fur Coat' *Daily Express* 26 September 1919 p.7.

<sup>170</sup> 'Bought on Credit' p.2.

‘Mr. Cassels [for the defence]: Do you know that your son told his wife to go to Harrods, buy a coat within a £20 limit, and put it to the family account?’

‘Witness: No, but I have a kind of recollection she said “[Sills] Keith gave me this coat.” I handed my son the account for it, saying “This is yours.” My son said, “I told her to get it.”’

‘The Magistrate: They are not living together now?’

‘Mr. Cassels: No, there was some sort of agreement, on separation, to pay her £3 a week, but it has not been paid.’

‘The Witness: He had very good cause for not paying her.’

The Magistrate decided that there was a ‘prima facie case to answer’ and sent the case to trial. ‘Bail was granted.’<sup>171</sup>

Why the Magistrate thought that this domestic issue was important enough to go to trial, when under examination the witness for the prosecution agreed that her son had authorised the transaction, is unclear. Earlier in the report, it was established that the mother-in-law’s daughter was ‘Lady Shiffner’. Sybil Shiffner’s late father-in-law had been a Justice of the Peace in Sussex, and it is conceivable that the Gibbons family’s place in society held sway with the authorities.<sup>172</sup> Whatever the reason, the new court date was set for 7 October, whereupon *The Pall Mall Gazette* continued the story.

‘Sarah Benedict Gibbons ... pleaded at London Sessions today, in answer to a charge of having feloniously obtained and attempted to obtain quantities of goods from Messrs. Harrods (Ltd.), that she understood that she could pledge the credit of her husband, to whom she had been married in January, and who had left her in February.’

‘Mr. Huntly Jenkins, for the prosecution, said if defendant really believed that her husband had given her permission to pledge his credit she had not committed any offence.’

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Bought on Credit’ p.2.

<sup>172</sup> Marriage Register Index, John Bridger Shiffner and Sybil H Gibbons, Marylebone, September quarter, 1918, 1a:1482, G.R.O.; Mosley, *Burke’s Peerage* p.3601.

‘Defendant was acquitted.’<sup>173</sup>

This is an intriguing glimpse into the judicial system in Britain at the end of the First World War, but it also demonstrates quite clearly that Sarah’s reputation and standing in society was of no interest to the Gibbons family who were keen to distance themselves from her. The marriage between Sarah and Sills was altogether brief and acrimonious, and if the report in the newspaper is to be believed, lasted less than a month.

Having researched Sills’ name through the birth, marriage and death registers, it was discovered that he would go on to marry a woman named Violet Carter in 1923, and by late spring of 1920, their first child had been born.<sup>174</sup> He had also filed for bankruptcy.<sup>175</sup>

In 1920, Sarah was presenting herself as an independent woman. On both the electoral register and in the telephone directory, she was listed alone under the name of Sarah Benedict Gibbons, at 46 Leinster Square, London, W2.<sup>176</sup> It is impossible to be certain whether the couple were living apart at that point, although given the evidence, it is highly likely. It is clear from the continuation of birth registrations for children of Sills and Violet that their relationship held strong, and the research fails to show Sills living at the same address as Sarah.<sup>177</sup> On the bankruptcy notices for 1920, corroborated by the London Electoral Registers of 1919, Sills domiciliary address was given as Charing Cross Road, near Leicester Square, some three or four miles across London from where Sarah was living.<sup>178</sup>

Sarah’s relationship with Sills was clearly unhappy, and although her association with him and his family may have initially boosted her social standing, it also brought about a certain amount of public humiliation, with the

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<sup>173</sup> ‘Pledged Husband’s Credit’ *Pall Mall Gazette* 8 October 1919 p.2.

<sup>174</sup> Marriage Register Index, Sills K. Gibbons and Violet Carter, Paddington, December quarter, 1923, 1a:157, G.R.O.; Birth Register Index, Elizabeth B. Gibbons.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Adjudications’ *London Gazette* 21 May 1920 p. 5795.

<sup>176</sup> Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers London, England, Sarah Gibbons, Lancaster Gate (West) Ward, 1920, LCC/PER, L.M.A.; General Post Office (G.P.O.) British Phone Books (1880-1984) Sarah Benedict Gibbons, Park, London 1920 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed January 2018).

<sup>177</sup> Birth Register Indexes for, Richard K. Gibbons, Fulham, September Quarter 1923, 1a:456; Terence K. Gibbons, Fulham, March Quarter 1927, 1a:373, all G.R.O.; Birth Certificate, Michael K. Gibbons.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Adjudications’ *London Gazette* 21 May 1920 p. 5795; Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers London, England, Sills Keith Gibbons, Covent Garden Ward, 1919, LCC/PER, L.M.A.

bankruptcy, the earlier court case, and Sills' involvement with his later wife. If the court reports were correct, Sarah had not received any payments from him since the break-up, so with Sills otherwise occupied, she returned to work.

## 2.5 Back to the Boards 1921 - 1923

In the inter-war years, it was unusual for married women to go into employment. Many occupations, such as the civil service and teaching, even carried a 'marriage bar', where married women could not be employed, and women who married whilst in a job were released, or rather, sacked.<sup>179</sup> Pamela Horn states 'In such cases females had to choose between a career and celibacy, or marriage and redundancy.'<sup>180</sup> Cheryl Law explains that 'The campaign against the marriage bar became, along with that for equal pay, one of the perennial issues of the 1920s and beyond.'<sup>181</sup> Horn shows that in 1921 only 14% of working women were married and only 8% divorced.<sup>182</sup> This placed Sarah in a minority, as she was working whilst married (on paper at least), and about to become divorced. The theatrical world had no conditions against marriage, and Sarah returned for a further training period at the Academy of Dramatic Art, which had since taken the 'Royal' title.<sup>183</sup> This later attendance at the school explains the appearance of her enrolment in 1920 within the archives at R.A.D.A. discussed earlier.<sup>184</sup> Sarah was involved in another student matinee in March 1921, this time at The Globe theatre, where her review came under the umbrella statement of 'other parts were admirably rendered by'.<sup>185</sup>

Following this, and a short period of employment, the first signs of her entrepreneurial spirit were displayed, as she followed in her father's footsteps,

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<sup>179</sup> Pamela Horn, *Women in the 1920s* (Stroud: Amberley 2010) p.30; Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement 1918-1928* (London; I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1997) p.84-85; Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the 20th Century: What Difference did the Vote Make?* (London and New York: Continuum 2004) p.18.

<sup>180</sup> Horn, *Women in the 1920s* p.30.

<sup>181</sup> Law, *Suffrage and Power* p.85.

<sup>182</sup> Catherine Hakim, 'Occupational Segregation,' Department of Employment Research Paper no.9, November 1979, pp.11-25, in Horn, *Women in the 1920s* p.213.

<sup>183</sup> 'Royal Academy of Dramatic Art' *The Era* 30 Mar 1921 p.15.

<sup>184</sup> Sarrah [sic] Benedict, Enrolment Lists, Library and Archive, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London, UK.

<sup>185</sup> 'Royal Academy of Dramatic Art' p.15; Sarrah [sic] Benedict, Enrolment Lists.

with evidence suggesting that she started her own theatrical touring company in January 1922.<sup>186</sup> This was an ambitious move. Perhaps she was receiving advice from her father, or she may have developed a sense of social confidence through her marriage. Davis, in a work covering the administration and management of theatres, as well as touring productions, shows that Sarah was relatively atypical as a female theatrical manager in the early twentieth century.<sup>187</sup> Although women were in a significant minority, Davis' database does list over 300 names of women in management from the late 1700s to 1914.

Working under the name of Sarah Benedict, she took on two plays, one titled *The Fourth Knave*, and the other *The Cinderella Man*, which was adapted from the novel by Edward Childs Carpenter. This was a popular play which had entered the West End at Queen's theatre in 1920 and had already been turned into a screenplay for a film by the Goldwyn Company.<sup>188</sup> Notices have been found of Sarah as leading lady in the show on a tour, employed under the Leonard Willoughby Company from October 1921 to the end of November 1921. The actors in this production were much the same as those who were employed later by Sarah's company.<sup>189</sup> The first record which has been found of the Sarah Benedict Company taking over was in January 1922 in Gloucestershire.<sup>190</sup>

*The Cinderella Man* told the story of Marjorie, a young woman, recently reunited with her extremely wealthy father, who fell in love with an impoverished poet living in the garret of the house next door. Sarah played the main role whilst producing the tour, which, as notices in theatrical and local press indicate, ran until May 1922.<sup>191</sup> *The Gloucestershire Echo* gave a glowing report:

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<sup>186</sup> 'Salisbury' *The Era* 25 January 1922 p.10.

<sup>187</sup> Tracy C. Davis, 'Female Managers, Lessees and Proprietors of the British Stage (to 1914), a Database Collected and Introduced by Tracy C. Davis,' *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 28:2 (2000) p.115.

<sup>188</sup> Alan Goble (ed), *The Complete Index to Literary Sources in Film* (London: Bowker-Saur 1999) p.71.

<sup>189</sup> Leonard Willoughby Ltd. toured with performances of *The Cinderella Man* with Sarah as lead from 20 October 1921 to 10 November 1921, see, 'Luton' *The Stage* 20 October 1921 p.8; 'New Brighton' *The Stage* 10 November 1921 p.6. *The Stage* and *The Era* have touring notices of the show until 28 November 1921 with no mention of the cast, see final mention 'On the Road' *The Era* 23 November 1921 p.17.

<sup>190</sup> 'The Coliseum Theatre' *The Gloucestershire Echo* 10 January 1922 p.4.

<sup>191</sup> 'Plays of the Year' *The Stage* 4 January 1923 p.17; 'Coliseum Theatre' *Gloucestershire Chronicle* 7 January 1922 p.8; 'The Fourth Knave' *The Era* 10 May 1922 p.7.

‘[The play] was received with much enthusiasm by last night’s audiences, and the success which it scored brought an unmistakeable triumph for Miss Benedict who was making her first venture in management.’<sup>192</sup>

The critic went on to explain that she was the daughter of A. B. Tapping, adding, ‘her talents will take her far in her profession.’ With this role, we see Sarah playing yet another woman from high society, and this invites a consideration of how successfully she played this part during her later Japanese experience.



6. Photograph of Sarah Benedict c. 1922, Mayer Family Collection.

During the run at Cheltenham, Sarah stayed at the Lansdown Hotel.<sup>193</sup> Also staying there that week was a young man named Robert John Mayer, another old Harrovian, who was to become extremely important to Sarah for the rest of her life. It is not known whether they were staying at the hotel together, or whether they actually met on this occasion. The ‘Visitors to Cheltenham’ record in the local newspaper had their names listed separately in alphabetical order.<sup>194</sup> Robert Mayer, otherwise known as Robin, was the son of Max Mayer, a wealthy diamond merchant, and had recently returned from his ‘grand tour’.<sup>195</sup> *The Times* had held a notice in the ‘Court Circular’ section in October 1920

<sup>192</sup> ‘The Coliseum Theatre’ *The Gloucestershire Echo* 10 January 1922 p.4.

<sup>193</sup> ‘Visitors to Cheltenham’ *The Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic* 14 January 1922 p.8.

<sup>194</sup> ‘Visitors to Cheltenham’ p.8.

<sup>195</sup> Birth Certificate of Robert John Mayer, Kensington, 3 November 1897 [1a:64] G.R.O.

saying that he was ‘to make a tour around the world’.<sup>196</sup> Having missed out on following his older brothers to Cambridge due to the outbreak of war, according to his daughter, his parents sent him abroad to gain an education in that way.<sup>197</sup> The incoming passenger lists held at The National Archives show him arriving home in June 1921, and the London Electoral Registers indicate that he moved into a flat at 171 Shaftesbury Avenue, close to the centre of the West End’s theatre area.<sup>198</sup>

No evidence has yet been found of Robert staying with Sarah in any other towns during the remainder of the tour, which covered much of the country, including Salisbury, New Brighton, Great Yarmouth, Southport and Torquay. Julie Holledge explains, ‘tours were divided into three separate categories: the No. 1 tours played the major cities such as Manchester and Glasgow, while the No. 2 and No. 3 visited smaller provincial towns.’<sup>199</sup> The literature on companies which, to a large degree, toured exclusively outside London is limited, as Viv Gardner noted in 2015:

‘Whilst there are many good local theatre histories, no overview of provincial theatre in Britain, including the contribution of the touring companies that crisscrossed the country during the first three decades of the twentieth century has appeared.’

Adding;

‘Yet these companies provided the theatre experience of most people in Britain.’<sup>200</sup>

Much of the data and information available for this particular subject must therefore be extrapolated from contemporary sources, such as, theatrical notices and publications; auto/biographies of actors and personnel involved in the activity; and general histories of the theatre. For example, to set Sarah’s new venture into an industrial context, using a technique utilised by Gardner, we

<sup>196</sup> ‘Court Circular’ *The Times* 14 October 1920 p.13;

<sup>197</sup> Conversation between the author and Mrs Peta Brown, September 2010.

<sup>198</sup> R.M.S. *Empress of Britain*, Liverpool, Arrival 1 June 1921, Incoming Passenger Lists, BT26, [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed March 2018); Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers London, England, Robert John Meyer [sic] Central St Giles Ward, 1922, LCC/PER, L.M.A.

<sup>199</sup> Holledge, *Innocent Flowers* p.14.

<sup>200</sup> Gardner, ‘Provincial Stages’ p.61.



can show that in January 1922 - the month that Sarah's tour as a company manager began - under the heading 'From The Provinces: Notes and News of Touring Plays', *The Era* listed eighty-four venues in total, of which seventy-seven had a live production listed, and seven were 'Picture Houses.'<sup>201</sup> Sarah's production at Salisbury was within these listings.

By the end of Sarah's tour in May 1922, *The Era* was listing one hundred and thirteen provincial theatres with touring productions across fifty-six towns.<sup>202</sup> This information was calculated from the column subtitled 'Notes and News of Touring Plays'. The use of the word 'plays' suggests all of the listings were structured drama of some description. In fact, less than half of the offerings on show could be described as such, with fifty one actual plays, musical, comedy or otherwise; thirty five variety or vaudeville productions; eight revues, and the remainder grouped under picture shows, concerts, opera, or it is unclear.<sup>203</sup> Although Sarah's show was not in these listings, a column in the following week's edition gave a brief précis and a pleasant review.<sup>204</sup>

To place Sarah herself within the industry, the evidence from *The Era* shows only one other woman named as the head of a touring company, Miss Viola Tree (the daughter of Herbert Beerbohm Tree), who was performing at The Grand Theatre in Blackpool.<sup>205</sup> There were other female managers of course. Lena Ashwell for example, another suffrage supporter, who had organised touring parties of players to entertain the troops during the recent war. In the inter-war period, she had an initiative for bringing high art within a theatrical setting to an audience otherwise unlikely to engage, and The Lena Ashwell Players were highly influential in the industry.<sup>206</sup> However, both Tree and Ashwell were considered much higher in the established hierarchy of the stage than Sarah, and came from a fixed theatre background, touring London productions.

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<sup>201</sup> Technique used by Gardner in, 'Provincial Stages' p.78; Data taken from 'From the Provinces' *The Era* 25 January 1922 p.10.

<sup>202</sup> 'From the Provinces' *The Era* 3 May 1922 p.10.

<sup>203</sup> 'From the Provinces' *The Era* 3 May 1922 p.10.

<sup>204</sup> 'The Fourth Knave' *The Era* 10 May 1922 p.7.

<sup>205</sup> 'From the Provinces' p.10.

<sup>206</sup> Margaret Leask, 'Lena Ashwell 1869-1957 "Actress, Patriot, Pioneer"', (thesis for Ph.D., University of Sydney, 2000); Maggie B Gale, 'Ashwell, Lena, (1872-1957) Actress and Theatre Manager,' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

A closer comparison to Sarah would be Ruby Kimberley, who had also grown up in the theatre, with parents who were lessees of large theatres, although she moved into revue, as opposed to drama.<sup>207</sup> Very few women have been found as the manager of a touring company whose productions did not begin life in London. Mona Glyn, who could also be compared to Sarah, took a company on tour in 1921, but within a few years was reappearing as an actress for other people.<sup>208</sup> So, Sarah was in relatively uncharted waters for females in her industrial endeavours, and this presents a woman uninhibited by the patriarchal aspects of the business.

In September 1922, Sarah was elected as a probationary member of the Association of Touring Managers (A.T.M.).<sup>209</sup> The association had appeared under different guises and names over the years, and Sarah's father had been a member since its inception, appearing at the first annual meeting in 1901.<sup>210</sup> In a report of the monthly general meeting of the A.T.M. in December 1922, Sarah was the only woman listed as present amongst fourteen men.<sup>211</sup> The A.T.M. no longer exists, and there is no central archive of records, so the small amount of information on the Association comes from contemporary theatrical publications, and fragments of material held in other collections. Notices of meetings continually show very few, or a complete lack of women. From the general meeting held in July 1921, *The Era* reported twenty-three men and no women present.<sup>212</sup> Additionally, there were five new members listed, all men, and another eight men listed as elected associate members. However, the following month, of the fourteen new members, one was a woman: Gladys Wilson.<sup>213</sup> This was not the norm though, for example the report for the July 1922 meeting showed eighteen men and no women present, and five new male members, and a year after that, the new committee was formed which included no women.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> 'Notable London Début' *The Era* 11 January 1922 p.7; 'Brighter Nights' *The Era* 30 August 1922 p.20.

<sup>208</sup> 'Cromer' *The Stage* 21 July 1921 p.3; 'Pontypool' *The Stage* 29 September 1921 p.16; 'Bury St Edmunds' *The Stage* 24 April 1924 p.21.

<sup>209</sup> 'Association of Touring Managers' *The Stage* 21 September 1922 p.19.

<sup>210</sup> 'Touring Managers' Association' *The Era* 6 April 1901 p.9.

<sup>211</sup> 'The A. T. M.' *The Stage* 21 December 1922 p.13.

<sup>212</sup> 'Association of Touring Managers' *The Era* 3 August 1921 p.9.

<sup>213</sup> 'A.T.M. Meeting' *The Era* 31 August 1921 p.9.

<sup>214</sup> 'Touring Managers' *The Era* 4 July 1923 p.17.

Taking a report in *The Stage* of the 1920 annual dinner of the A.T.M., there were seventy-three names listed as 'among those attended', of which eleven would appear to be women alone, or unaccompanied by a husband.<sup>215</sup> From a check for these women through issues of *The Stage* for 1920-1929, only one, the previously mentioned Mona Glyn appears to have been a company manager, the others working as actresses or dancers. Therefore, although Sarah was not the first female to become involved with the A.T.M., she seems to have been very much in the minority.

These newspaper reports showing Sarah as the only female in an otherwise all male meeting, and the lack of evidence found regarding other female touring managers, indicate that Sarah was becoming comfortable challenging the gender distinctions in her chosen occupation – a precursor to her later endeavours in a male dominated sphere - and are an indication of her attitude to the conventions of a patriarchal society.

Generally, A.T.M. meetings took place at 178 Shaftesbury Avenue, seven doors away from where Robert, Sarah's new friend was living.<sup>216</sup> Sarah utilised her membership of the A.T.M. in November 1922, as an arbitration case had been brought against her by Mr. Blundell Murray, one of the actors in her company who played the older, comedic, character role. It is not known what the case against Sarah was, but two years later, Blundell Murray took another company to court over a wage dispute which he won. However, the disagreement with Sarah 'resulted in a decision favourable to Miss Benedict.'<sup>217</sup> Again, here we see a woman unwilling to be intimidated by a male member of her staff, and this gives us insight into the formation of a female sporting hero.

The Permanent Arbitration service had been set up in the 1920/1921 season by the Actors Association and the A.T.M., overseeing disputes between actors and their managers.<sup>218</sup> In the year between June 1921 and 1922, there were

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<sup>215</sup> 'The Touring Managers' Association' *The Stage* 29 January 1920 p.13.

<sup>216</sup> 'Associate Members' Meeting' *The Era* 14 September 1921 p.7; Cuthbert Whitaker (ed), *An Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1922* (London: J. Whitaker and Sons 1922) p.362.

<sup>217</sup> 'Touring Managers' *The Era* 30 November 1922 p.14; 'Association of Touring Managers' *The Stage* 23 November 1922 p.23.

<sup>218</sup> 'A Permanent Arbitration Board' *The Era* 29 June 1921 p.8; H. R. Barbor, *The Theatre: An Art and an Industry* (London: Labour Publishing Company 1924) p.45.

reportedly '13 arbitrations ... held in disputes arising between touring managers and artists or resident managers'.<sup>219</sup>

In 1922, Sarah not only had to deal with the day to day problems of a manager, but she also began her work as a playwright, penning what is thought to be her first play, with co-author J. Leslie Sparkes.<sup>220</sup> He was a more experienced writer, and had already had some of his work produced.<sup>221</sup> This show, called *The Fourth Knave*, replaced *The Cinderella Man* to continue the tour in April.<sup>222</sup>

Sarah was coming to the role of playwright at an interesting time for women in that profession. Aston and Reineld explain that 'The masculinist managerial and organisational structures of Edwardian theatre offered little, if any, support to the woman playwright'.<sup>223</sup> The actions of the Actresses Franchise League (A.F.L.) and The Pioneer Players, amongst others, in promoting women as writers as well as performers, chiefly as a means of support for women's suffrage, produced a precedence from which it became easier for women such as Sarah to write professionally.<sup>224</sup> As Gale notes, 'Although the overtly feminist A.F.L. had disbanded by the beginning of the inter-war period, its professional membership continued to seek and find work in the theatre.'<sup>225</sup>

Gale also states that 'many of the women playwrights had begun their professional lives as actresses,' considering that 'the move from enactor of text to creator of text represented a challenge to existing traditional roles for women in the process of making theatre,' adding, 'women playwrights were not a new phenomenon, but during the 1920s and 1930s they seem suddenly to have appeared in large numbers.'<sup>226</sup> In *Innocent Flowers*, Holledge claims to have

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<sup>219</sup> 'Annual Meeting' *The Era* 5 July 1922 p.5.

<sup>220</sup> Nicol, *English Drama, 1900-1930* p.506.

<sup>221</sup> See for example, 'The Lie' *The Era* 15 April 1914 p.11; 'The Kingsway' *The Stage* 15 April 1920 p.16.

<sup>222</sup> 'Sarah Benedict's Companies' *The Stage* 30 March 1922 p.21.

<sup>223</sup> Maggie B. Gale, 'Women Playwrights of the 1920s and 1930s,' in Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, *Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p.4.

<sup>224</sup> Gale, 'Women Playwrights' p.4; Holledge, *Innocent Flowers* pp.43-46; Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage* p.32 – Cockin provides a caveat regarding the Pioneer Players' use of female playwrights, showing that their work was far from exclusively written by women.

<sup>225</sup> Maggie B. Gale, 'Errant Nymphs: Women and the Inter-War Theatre,' in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre Between the Wars 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) pp.113-134.

<sup>226</sup> Gale, 'Errant Nymphs' p.117.

found over four hundred female playwrights between 1900 and 1920.<sup>227</sup> So in this endeavour, Sarah was not flouting the norm, but embracing the chance to give voice to her ambition.

Sarah would not ultimately be defined as a playwright, however, and she did not produce another known work for some eighteen years. But whilst her career was burgeoning, her private life was changing, and on 27 September 1922 Sills started divorce proceedings, citing Robert John Mayer as co-respondent.<sup>228</sup> Between 1858 and 1923 a husband could divorce his wife on the grounds of adultery.<sup>229</sup> However, if a wife wanted to start proceedings, there had to be an additional factor such as, bigamy; incest or cruelty; two years desertion; or rape, sodomy or bestiality. These were known collectively as 'aggravating' factors, and needed to be proven.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, when a marriage broke down, it was a much simpler exercise for a man to petition for divorce, and the truth may often have been stretched somewhat when presented to the court.

However convoluted and difficult the divorce laws made it to contemplate such a move, particularly for those with lower incomes, and for women, who often had no personal income at all, the numbers of marriages ending in divorce was steadily rising.<sup>231</sup> So, Sarah was again conforming to a growing trend. However, there is a juxtaposition in detail, with the petition having been filed in 1922. Between 1918 and 1920, figures show that the divorce rates went from just over one thousand to over three thousand, but 1922 figures drop from 3,522 in 1921 to 2,588, with numbers rising again to reach similar heights in 1929/1930.<sup>232</sup>

In the divorce proceedings between Sills and Sarah, she was recorded as living at 171 Shaftesbury Avenue, that is, Robert's address on the electoral register after his return from abroad in 1921. She was also accused of living in adultery with Robert at Gordon Street, Gordon Square since early May 1922. Sills' second child with Violet Carter was born in June 1922, and the address of the

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<sup>227</sup> Holledge, *Innocent Flowers* p.3.

<sup>228</sup> Divorce Papers, Sills Keith Gibbons and Sarah Winifred Gibbons, J77/1921/87 (1922) T.N.A.

<sup>229</sup> Horn, *Women in the 1920s* p.48.

<sup>230</sup> Lesley A. Hall, *Sex Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2013) p.115; Ann Summer Holmes, 'The Double Standard in the English Divorce Laws, 1857-1923,' *Law and Social Inquiry* 20 (1995) p.602.

<sup>231</sup> 'People, Population,' Office for National Statistics [online] [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk) (accessed 17 May 2016).

<sup>232</sup> 'People, Population,' Office for National Statistics.

parents on the birth certificate is Loftus Road in Hammersmith, however, Sills' address on the divorce papers was recorded as 34 Charlwood Street, Pimlico.<sup>233</sup> All of this evidence shows the possibility that an alteration of the facts to achieve the desired goal may have been used in this case.

Considering the difficulties involved, there were, historically, a remarkably high number of female petitioners. In fact, in 1915, the disparity between the sexes was minimal, with 354 men instigating proceedings against 326 women, partly due of course to women's increasing financial and emotional independence during the war.<sup>234</sup> However, by 1920, when many men had returned home and resumed employment, often usurping women from their new-found freedoms, this ratio changes enormously showing 2,373 men to 717 women.<sup>235</sup> So, again, we see Sarah fitting into national norms, being divorced by Sills, despite his relationship with another woman.

Historian of law, Rebecca Probert tells us that, if the petitioner themselves were an adulterer, then the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes could use their discretion as to whether or not to grant the divorce.<sup>236</sup> She explains that there were three circumstances under which the court would still award the decree: if the petitioner's adultery were 'innocent', 'unwilling', or 'condoned'. Sills relationship with Violet did not seem to fit any of these criteria, so it was not given in evidence, and the court was no wiser. This gives cause for an assumption of some collusion on Sarah's part.

Divorce laws changed in July 1923, within the duration of the Gibbons' case, meaning that a woman was then able to divorce her husband purely on the grounds of adultery. Although this did not affect Sarah's case, it led to an increase in female petitioners and helped towards the rise in figures overall.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Divorce Papers, Sills Keith Gibbons and Sarah Winifred Gibbons, J77/1921/87 (1922) T.N.A.

<sup>234</sup> 'People, Population,' Office for National Statistics; Horn, *Women in the 1920s* pp.212-213.

<sup>235</sup> 'People, Population,' Office for National Statistics.

<sup>236</sup> Rebecca Probert *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600 to 2011* (New York; Cambridge University Press 2012) p.105.

<sup>237</sup> Fiona A. Montgomery, *Women's Rights: Struggles and Feminism in Britain c1770-1970* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2006) p.37; Stephen Cretney, *Family Law in the Twentieth Century: A History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2003) p.221.

On 3 October 1923, the final decree came through for Sills and Sarah.<sup>238</sup> In the same year, her brother Tom and his wife Norah attempted a divorce, but were not granted one on that occasion, although they were successful three years later, showing that the subterfuge employed in the Gibbons' case was perhaps necessary for success.<sup>239</sup>

## 2.6 Chapter Two: Conclusions

Although her family projected an image of a successful middle-class unit, Sarah's social standing at birth was coloured by her association with the theatre, and her illegitimacy. However, her likely attendance at schools abroad, and at the Academy of Dramatic Art, gave her a certain amount of credibility within both the profession, and wider society. As a child, she was surrounded by prominent members and leading lights of both the modern theatre and suffrage movements, perhaps fuelling her pioneering spirit, and providing a link to and awareness of early *jūjutsu*.

With Sarah's first marriage, although brief, we witness not only a rise in the social hierarchy, but a changing and maturing woman. She became more assertive, risk-taking and creative, developing as an entrepreneurial professional. She took control of her own affairs and confronted the challenges for a woman in a man's world, and with that we see, perhaps, a pre-cursor to her time in Japan.

Despite the shame that would have accompanied the end of the Gibbons' marriage, a new chapter arose for Sarah, which would bring another, even higher social incarnation, more public humiliation, and perhaps, the defining moment of her life.

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<sup>238</sup> Divorce Papers, Sills Keith Gibbons and Sarah Winifred Gibbons, J77/1921/87 (1922) T.N.A.

<sup>239</sup> Divorce Papers, Thomas Alfred Tapping and Norah Tapping, J77/2010/2979, (1923) T.N.A.

### 3. Bright Young People

‘No rules, no regulations, dress as you please and the whole of the crew to wait on you.’

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with Sarah’s relationship and life with her new husband Robert Mayer, witnessing a change in her social group, and a vast difference to the physical manifestation of her wealth within the marriage. The evidence presented here continues the attempt to answer the question of Sarah’s position within the British class system, and shows that the newly acquired societal coterie within which she began to operate, was part of a wider social ‘set’ involving diplomats, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie of the period. If this marriage had not taken place, it is possible that Sarah would never have made her trip, and this could have changed the development of women’s judo.

This chapter also introduces her involvement in, and connections to, Japanese culture and judo through the Budokwai. To elucidate fully Sarah’s involvement with judo before her trip to Japan, within the context of the judo culture in London at that time, a section of this chapter (3.4) is dedicated to that end. For a greater understanding of Sarah’s place within the history of women’s judo in Britain and the gendered construct of the sport in the inter-war period, this section also provides a brief precis of the significant women and events in the lead up to the 1920s. Therefore, sections 3.2 and 3.3, although covering the period in which she began her association with the Budokwai, do not go into detail, but simply observe events related to judo within the timeline.

The final section is concerned with Sarah’s journey across the world to Japan, considering whether she travelled as a self-conscious pioneer seeking celebrity, as a sports tourist, or simply as a tourist looking to experience the Far Eastern cultures with which she had fallen in love.<sup>1</sup>

The opening sections, however, are concerned with the circumstances under which an illegitimate, Roman Catholic, divorced actress married a wealthy

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Burman, ‘Racing Bodies: Dress and Pioneer Women Aviators and Racing Drivers,’ *Women’s History Review* 9:2 (2000) pp.299-326.



Jewish heir and barrister, and the group of friends and acquaintances who helped to shape her life.

### 3.2 A New Husband 1924 - 1927

With the divorce settled, Sarah and Sills were free to marry again. Sills married Violet Carter almost immediately, and they went on to have a long marriage with several children, moving to Southern Rhodesia in the 1930s and spending the remainder of their days there.<sup>2</sup>

The situation for Sarah and Robert was more complicated. If Robert wanted to inherit part of the family fortune, the will of his father Max had stipulated that before he could marry, there were certain conditions to be met.<sup>3</sup> Max Mayer was a diamond and pearl merchant, who had emigrated from Germany in around 1880, becoming a naturalized British Subject in 1889.<sup>4</sup> His business was extremely successful and he was said to have dealt in some of the most valuable jewels in the world, including the Agra Diamond, and what was thought to be the most expensive pearl necklace to that date.<sup>5</sup> The story of this necklace was to arise in Sarah's life a little later.

To gain an idea of the wealth into which Sarah was marrying, Max's will was obtained through the probate service. Within it, he was shown to have left effects to the value of £430,351-13s on his death in 1921, but the will included various provisos.<sup>6</sup> Robert's share of the money was put in trust, and if he married before the age of thirty, against the wishes of his mother Mathilde and his older brother Percy, he would lose his inheritance. It is impossible to know if Sarah and Robert had met before his father had died, prompting this addition to the will, although the codicil was written in January 1921 which was before Robert's return from abroad, so it would seem unlikely. Also, Robert's younger

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<sup>2</sup> Marriage Register Index, Sills Keith Gibbons and Violet Carter, Paddington, December Quarter 1923, 1a:157, G.R.O.; Information from the Grandchild of Sills Keith Gibbons and Violet Carter to the author.

<sup>3</sup> Will of Max Mayer, died 17 September 1921, proven 30 September 1921, Principle Probate Registry, UK.

<sup>4</sup> Home Office: Immigration and Nationality Department, Naturalization Papers of Max Mayer, HO-144/307 T.N.A.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Streeter Jewel Sale' *The Times* 23 Feb 1905 p.8; 'The Stolen Necklace' *The Times* 28 July 1913 p.5

<sup>6</sup> National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) Max Mayer, 1921, Principal Probate Registry [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed 11 May 2016); Will of Max Mayer.

brother Edward had the same conditions applied to his inheritance, giving further evidence to the contrary. The family must have approved the match as papers were drawn up before the wedding to ensure the safety of the family money if the marriage were to break down. After the settlement was finally completed on 10 July 1924, Robert and Sarah married exactly a week later.<sup>7</sup>

The couple lived at 61 Kennington Oval in London in a house overlooking the iconic cricketing venue, and they married in the nearby Roman Catholic Church of St Anne's.<sup>8</sup> It could be assumed, due to the use of the name Benedict by Sarah and her father, that she had a connection to Catholicism. Indeed, one of the educational establishments known to have been attended by Alfred's stepdaughter, Sydney, was a convent school.<sup>9</sup> However, Sarah was a divorcee, and Robert's parents were of the Jewish faith. This thesis will not attempt to research deeply into Canon Law of the Catholic Church, but as the marriage between a Roman Catholic divorced woman (which in itself signifies a contradiction) and a Jewish man would seem to be unusual, the work will attempt a simple broad analysis of the situation.

An entry in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* written in 1910 entitled 'Mixed Marriages' explained:

'For the issuing of a dispensation for a mixed marriage, the Church requires three conditions; that the Catholic party be allowed free exercise of religion, that all the offspring are to be brought up Catholics and that the Catholic party promise to do all that is possible to convert the non-Catholic.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis and White (Solicitors), Appointment of new trustee, 2 December 1930 held in the Mayer family collection; Marriage Certificate, Robert John Mayer and Sarah Winifred Benedict Gibbons, 17 July 1924, Lambeth, 1g:781, G.R.O.

<sup>8</sup> In September 1880, the Oval had been the venue for the first 'Test match' ever held in England, and two years later Australia's victory over England on the ground led to a Test series between England and Australia to be dubbed 'The Ashes'; Marriage Certificate, Robert John Mayer and Sarah Winifred Benedict Gibbons.

<sup>9</sup> Sydney Fairbrother, *Through an Old Stage Door* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd 1939) p.41.

<sup>10</sup> William Fanning, 'Mixed Marriage,' *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume 9* (New York: Robert Appleton Company 1910) [online] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09698a.htm> (accessed February 2018).

As far as Sarah being a divorced woman was concerned, she had married Sills in a civil ceremony, therefore in the eyes of the Catholic Church, that marriage would not have been recognised, and she would be free to marry in church.<sup>11</sup>

As a re-married woman, Sarah, once again appears to have given up professional work in the theatre, and in 1923, Robert was admitted to the Inner Temple to train as a barrister.<sup>12</sup> Following the marriage, they moved further out of London to Box Hill in Surrey, a picturesque site, with far reaching views over the countryside.<sup>13</sup> Their bungalow, called *Three Wishes*, was a small, white, half-timbered building with a paddock at the rear.<sup>14</sup>



7. Photograph of Robert and Sarah Mayer at Box Hill, Mayer Family Collection.

In October 1924 Sarah advertised in *The Rugby Advertiser* and in January the following year in *The Times* for help.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Augustinus Lehmkuhl, 'Divorce (in Moral Theology),' *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume 5* (New York: Robert Appleton Company 1909) [online] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05054c.htm> (accessed February 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Inner Temple, Admissions and Calls Index (1547-1969), Robert John Mayer, Archives of the Inner Temple, London.

<sup>13</sup> G.P.O. British Phone Books (1880-1984), R. J. Mayer, Three Wishes, Betchworth, 1925 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed March 2018); Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, Surrey, England, Robert John Mayer, Reigate, 1924, CC802/39/7, Surrey History Centre, Woking, UK.

<sup>14</sup> Photographs held in the Mayer family collection.

<sup>15</sup> 'Situations Vacant' *Rugby Advertiser* 10 October 1924 p.6.

'Married Couple wanted, entire work, small country bungalow; two in family; good cooking and references required; liberal wages offered really good servants. – Mrs. Mayer, "Three Wishes," Betchworth, Surrey.'<sup>16</sup>

'Entire work' meant that the couple were to be the only means of looking after the house, garden and the employers themselves.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the earlier advertisement requested that the male half of the couple double up as a gardener and chauffeur.<sup>18</sup> This was perhaps an economical way to retain servants, often cheaper than paying two single members of staff, and was popular, with a large section of the advertisements in *The Times* taken over with requests for 'Married Couples'.<sup>19</sup> Virginia Woolf also advertised for someone to undertake 'entire work' in her flat in 1929, although not looking for a husband and wife, she was more specific than Sarah in her choice of candidate, asking for a woman of 'intelligence and initiative'.<sup>20</sup>

There was a need for women to return to domestic work following the war in order to release jobs for returning servicemen, and various schemes were devised by the authorities to encourage them.<sup>21</sup> The systems put in place were beginning to work and by the 1921 census, a quarter of women in employment were working in 'domestic service'.<sup>22</sup> Although, as Braybon presents, 'The 1921 census showed that the proportion of "gainfully employed females" (over ten years old) was slightly lower than it had been in 1911: 30.8 per cent, as opposed to 32.3 per cent.'<sup>23</sup> However, Delap describes domestic workers moving 'fluidly in and out of service and other occupations or roles', not remaining trapped in the 'upstairs downstairs' environment but taking more control of their own situations.<sup>24</sup> Hollows debates the 'cultural narratives' which serve to define the 'servant problem' in inter-war Britain, and which

<sup>16</sup> 'Married Couples and Menservants' *The Times* 14 Jan 1924 p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011) p.14.

<sup>18</sup> 'Situations Vacant' p.6.

<sup>19</sup> Delap, *Knowing Their Place* p.15; 'Married Couples and Menservants' p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: The Hidden Heart of Domestic Service* (New York: Bloomsbury Press 2007) p.196.

<sup>21</sup> Celia Briar, *Working For Women?: Gendered Work And Welfare Policies In Twentieth Century Britain* (London and Pennsylvania: University College London Press 1997) p.42.

<sup>22</sup> Pamela Horn, *Women in the 1920s* (Stroud: Amberley 2010) p.213.

<sup>23</sup> Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2013) p.210.

<sup>24</sup> Delap, *Knowing Their Place* p.30.

'undoubtedly framed the construction and experience of middle-class femininity during a period in which domesticity was in this "state of flux".'<sup>25</sup>

The role of the middle-class housewife was also changing, with new technologies giving women the option for a 'Servantless House'.<sup>26</sup> Sarah clearly did not mean to utilise this new machinery which was intended to aid the woman at home in the expression of her feminine modernity, when the more traditional lifestyle of employer and servant was possible.<sup>27</sup> It could be considered that this aspect of their lives might have been encouraged or initiated by Robert. However, later evidence of Sarah's time in Japan shows the use of a maid while living alone, therefore it would seem that she was not averse to employing help.<sup>28</sup> This neatly shows the theme of juxtaposition within this thesis, of the traditional against the modern which characterises much of Sarah's life. As Delap concludes, "'Modernity" as an analytical concept tends to stress discontinuity with the past, and thus has lent itself to narratives of the decline or obsolescence of domestic service.'<sup>29</sup>

Despite the problems associated with domestic employees, the seemingly idyllic existence as young, middle-class, Surrey homeowners continued for a few years for Sarah and Robert. The paddock was taken up with the odd goat and Chow-Chow dogs, which notices in *The Times*, along with family photographs, confirm that Sarah was breeding and showing.<sup>30</sup> The dogs seem to have been a new focus for Sarah, who characteristically threw herself into the hobby, competing at a prestigious event at Crystal Palace.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Joanne Hollows, 'Science and Spells: Cooking, Lifestyle and Domestic Femininities in British *Good Housekeeping* in the Inter-War Period,' in David Bell (ed), *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s* (London and New York: Routledge 2006) p.24.

<sup>26</sup> Quote from *Good Housekeeping* in, Hollows, 'Science and Spells' p.25; Delap, *Knowing Their Place* pp.98-139.

<sup>27</sup> Hollows, 'Science and Spells' p.25.

<sup>28</sup> Letter 3, Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gungi, 23 July 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>29</sup> Delap, *Knowing Their Place* p.3.

<sup>30</sup> 'Kennel, Farm and Aviary' *The Times* 25 November 1925 p.1; Photographs held in the Mayer family collection.

<sup>31</sup> 'Championship Dog Show' *Surrey Mirror* 16 April 1926 p.10.



8. Photograph of Sarah Mayer with Chows, Mayer Family Collection.

The couple seem to have enjoyed their leisure time too, with records showing a holiday to the Georgian city of Bath, where they stayed for two weeks in the winter of 1924/1925, at The Empire Hotel, one of the most prominent hotels in the city, overlooking the river and park.<sup>32</sup> With such fragmentation of the evidence for Sarah's life, it is these small details which help to define the lifestyle and social sphere in which she found herself in the early years of her marriage to Robert.

The new year of 1926 brought about an era of change for the Mayers. At the beginning of the year, Florence, the first wife of Sarah's father, died aged seventy-five, meaning that Alfred and Alice were finally free to marry.<sup>33</sup> The wedding took place at the local register office in Lewisham, and the witnesses were their son Tom, and Alice's sister Sarah Elizabeth.<sup>34</sup> Florence had continued working under the name of Mrs. A. B. Tapping until her death, but it would not be unreasonable to consider that Alfred and Alice had put across a convincing show of marriage to the outside world, therefore creating the need for discretion when it came to their actual wedding.<sup>35</sup> As Durbach remarks; 'In

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<sup>32</sup> 'Bath Visitors' List' *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 17 Jan 1925 p.27.

<sup>33</sup> Death Register Index, Florence Tapping, Westhampnett, March Quarter, 1926, 2b:523, G.R.O.

<sup>34</sup> Marriage Certificate, Alfred Benedict Tappin and Alice Amelia Fishwick, Lewisham, 8 April 1926, G.R.O.

<sup>35</sup> Registrar General, 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 2745, T.N.A.

the early twentieth century, illegitimacy continued to carry a social stigma', from which the couple are likely to have wanted to shield their children.<sup>36</sup> Alfred and Alice married on 8 April 1926.<sup>37</sup> On 12 April, Alfred made out his will in which he left his whole estate to Alice, unless she predeceased him, when the three children inherited everything in equal share.<sup>38</sup>

Changes continued for Robert and Sarah, and research through the 'Admissions and Calls Index' at the archives of the Inner Temple show that in June, Robert was 'Called to the Bar', as he had finished his three years of study to qualify as a barrister.<sup>39</sup> The index gave his address as Three Wishes, Betchworth, Surrey, and his father's details.<sup>40</sup> The 'Law Lists', described by The National Archives as 'a directory of lawyers published annually between 1775 and 1976', only gave his name and the date of his admission however, which suggests that he was not actually practicing as a barrister.<sup>41</sup>

It was also at the beginning of 1926, in January, that Sarah first joined the Budokwai to learn judo.<sup>42</sup> In a later interview in Japan, she stated that Robert had started judo training with her but did not enjoy it.<sup>43</sup> For Sarah too, this would appear initially to have been a short-lived exercise, and the records show that she would re-join the Budokwai in November 1927.<sup>44</sup> The reason for Sarah's initial choice to leave the Budokwai after a short time, is likely to be related to the fact that by October, perhaps due to the financial problems within the country, and social unrest following the General Strike, the couple would appear to have made the decision to leave Britain for a life in Africa.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Nadja Durbach, 'Private Lives, Public Records: Illegitimacy and the Birth Certificate in Twentieth-Century Britain,' *20th Century British History* 25:2 (2014) p.309.

<sup>37</sup> Marriage Certificate, Alfred Benedict Tappin and Alice Amelia Fishwick, Lewisham, 8 April 1926 [1d:2025].

<sup>38</sup> Will of Alfred Benedict Tappin, died 31 December 1928, proven 1 February 1929, Principle Probate Registry, UK.

<sup>39</sup> Inner Temple, Admissions and Calls Index.

<sup>40</sup> Inner Temple, Admissions and Calls Index.

<sup>41</sup> The Law Society, *Law Lists* (London: V. & R. Stevens and G.S. Norton, 1896-1976); National Archives, Research Guides, Lawyers [online] <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> (accessed April 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Richard Bowen 'Appendix,' B.64, R.B.C.

<sup>43</sup> 'Blonde Hair Jujutsu' Unnamed and Undated Newspaper Clipping held with Letters from Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi February 1934-January 1935 [in Japanese] C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>44</sup> Bowen 'Appendix'.

<sup>45</sup> S.S. *Gaika*, London, Departure 7 October 1926, UK Outwards Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed May 2016).

Contracted to land at Cape Town, Robert boarded the S.S. *Gaika* in London.<sup>46</sup> His occupation was listed as 'Farming' (of which there has been no other evidence found) and his 'Place of Intended Future Permanent Residence' was South Africa.<sup>47</sup> He travelled first class, and his outgoing address was given as 'Three Wishes, Tadworth', but Sarah was not travelling with him.

Robert left for Cape Town on 7 October 1926, and on 26 October, a preliminary announcement found in an August edition of *The Surrey Mirror* shows that the furniture from the bungalow was put up for auction.<sup>48</sup> Whilst Robert was away, Sarah moved back into London, to 4 Gledhow Gardens, SW5, and in 1927, this is where she appeared on the electoral register.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps Robert's trip was a reconnaissance or fact-finding mission, with the intention of immigration, but it was relatively short lived. With new land companies profiting from the British moves to the Dominions, Edna Bradlow explains that there was money to be made, but not necessarily by the émigrés:

'By 1922 at least twenty new companies were operating out of London alone. At worst many of these "mushroom" companies were "unadulterated swindles"; at best they neglected to make even the most elementary but essential soil and water analysis'.<sup>50</sup>

Whether conditions for immigrants were not as expected, or whether it just didn't feel like the right move, it is impossible to confirm, but on 17 January 1927, after leaving Cape Town, Robert arrived back in Southampton.<sup>51</sup> His occupation on the return passenger list was 'Barrister at Law', and his address, Gledhow Gardens, where Sarah had been living since his departure. There appears to have been no further attempt by the couple to leave Britain for a life abroad, although there were other trips both together and apart, for pleasure

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<sup>46</sup> S.S. *Gaika*, London, 7 October 1926.

<sup>47</sup> S.S. *Gaika*, London, 7 October 1926.

<sup>48</sup> S.S. *Gaika*, London, 7 October 1926; 'Chas. Osenton and Co.' *Surrey Mirror* 27 August 1926 p.1.

<sup>49</sup> Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, London, England, Sarah Mayer, Kensington, 1927, LCC/PER/B, L.M.A.

<sup>50</sup> Edna Bradlow, 'Empire Settlement and South African Immigration Policy, 1910-1948,' in Stephen Constantine (ed), *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 1990) p.184.

<sup>51</sup> S.S. *Edinburgh Castle*, London, Arrival 17 January 1927, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed February 2018).



and business, including a holiday to the fashionable Italian city of Naples, and of course Sarah's journey east.<sup>52</sup>

Sarah's new marriage had cemented her position as a lady of leisure, who had asserted her Roman Catholic faith, and moved into the bourgeois Surrey Hills. The possibility of a new life in South Africa seemingly rejected, the couple had returned to London. The fact that she had not joined her husband on the fact-finding mission to the Dominions, seems at odds with the adventuring spirit with which Sarah is associated, and her return to London with no new exciting exploit, may have fuelled her later quest for such. In the meantime, there was money to be spent, and the couple were moving again.

### 3.3 Quarr House 1928 - 1933

In 1928, Herbert Hoover gave his famous speech regarding 'the final triumph over poverty'.<sup>53</sup> Robert and Sarah, as with the rest of the unsuspecting public, were seemingly unaware of the forthcoming devastating downturn in global finances and were looking for their largest investment yet: that is, a country house estate. This would lift Sarah's standing in society once again to new heights, with a home to match her upward trajectory.

In October, Quarr House in Sway, in the ancient landscape of The New Forest in Hampshire, came on the market and was advertised in *Country Life* and *The Times*.<sup>54</sup>

'A very attractive and compact Freehold RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY in high and bracing position, comprising imposing House, approached by carriage drive, and containing ten bed and dressing rooms, billiard room,

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<sup>52</sup> S.S. *Ormonde*, London, Departure 1 October 1927, UK Outwards Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed February 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Charles Rappleye, *Herbert Hoover in the White House: The Ordeal of the Presidency* (New York and London: Simon and Schuster 2016) p.28. For an overview of the economics involved in the lead up to the Great Depression see, Thomas E. Hall and J. David Ferguson, *The Great Depression: An International Disaster of Perverse Economic Policies* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press 2011).

<sup>54</sup> 'Hampton and Sons' Supplement to *Country Life*, 6 October 1928 p.viii (accessed through Proquest February 2016); 'Hampton and Sons' *The Times* 11 September 1928 p.26.

servants' accommodation, three bathrooms, two staircases, spacious hall, five beautiful reception rooms and compact offices.'<sup>55</sup>



9. Photograph of Quarr House, Mayer Family Collection.

The house offered modern drainage, its own electric light and water, plus a 'Lodge, garages, looseboxes, three cottages, glasshouse, delightful pleasure grounds, kitchen garden and orchard: In all about 13 acres.'<sup>56</sup> The house was to be sold at auction on 16 October 1928 at 2.30pm unless previously sold, and on 18 December 1928 Robert's trust fund supplied him with £6,350 to complete the purchase.<sup>57</sup> Flouting the 'housing problem' described by Samy as 'a serious economic and social issue', with their greater purchasing power, the lack of affordable stock for working-class buyers did not affect the Mayers.<sup>58</sup> Tinniswood defines the period between the wars as a time 'which saw new families buying, borrowing and sometimes building themselves a country house; which introduced new aesthetics, new social structures, new meanings to an old tradition'.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> 'Hampton and Sons' *Country Life*.

<sup>56</sup> 'Hampton and Sons' *Country Life*.

<sup>57</sup> Lewis and White (Solicitors), Appointment of new trustee, 2 Dec 1930, held in the Mayer family collection.

<sup>58</sup> Luke Samy, 'Indices of House Prices and Rent Prices of Residential Property in London, 1895-1939,' (Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History, Number 134, Oxford University, April 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Adrian Tinniswood, *The Long Weekend: Life in the English Country House Between the Wars* (London: Jonathan Cape 2016) Preface.

Just thirteen days after the sale of the house was complete, Sarah's father Alfred died. He had suffered from uraemia and passed away at home in Lewisham, aged seventy-seven.<sup>60</sup> This may have been one of a series of major events in Sarah's life that influenced her subsequent decision to leave her seemingly idyllic lifestyle.

The couple continued to furnish the house, and Robert's trust fund again provided the money, with a total of £4,650 spent on refurbishing and furnishing. Legal expenses totalled £169-8s-9d.<sup>61</sup> An inventory held in the Mayer family papers describes the items bought by Robert and Sarah for Quarr.<sup>62</sup> This document provides important details regarding the social history of the middle classes, or so-called *nouveau riche*, in the inter-war period, related to works such as Horn's *Country House Society* or Thomson's *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture*.<sup>63</sup> The inventory shows that six rooms for the lower servants contained a three-foot iron bedstead and combination dressing chests and washstands. Each had a mattress, mattress protector and bolster as well as a pillow. One of the rooms had a white painted bedstead and bedding, possibly for a servant with a more senior position. The total cost for all six of the other sets was £27 in comparison to £4-15s for the painted variety.

Listed in the inventory under 'Structure and Decoration' at just over £1,765, refurbishments came to 27.79% of the purchase price, and despite Sarah's contretemps with the store approximately ten years earlier, three pages were dedicated to sundry purchases from Harrods Ltd., where the bill appears to have come to exactly £200.<sup>64</sup> More than £70 was spent at Burroughs and Watts on refurbishing the billiard table alone. Over £2,000 was spent on furniture at B. Cohen and Sons Ltd, with the North, South-East, South-West, and Best bedrooms completely fitted with new sets in the latest walnut and mahogany fashions.<sup>65</sup> Cohen and Sons had an enormous factory and showroom on Curtain Road in Shoreditch, a centre for the furniture trade, where customers

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<sup>60</sup> Death Certificate, Alfred Benedict Tapping, Lewisham, 31 December 1928, G.R.O.

<sup>61</sup> R. J. Mayer, Inventory of goods bought for Quarr House, 1929, held in the Mayer family collection.

<sup>62</sup> Mayer, Inventory of goods.

<sup>63</sup> Pamela Horn, *Country House Society: The Private Lives of England's Upper Class after the First World War* (Stroud: Amberley 2015); F. M. L. Thomson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001).

<sup>64</sup> Mayer, Inventory of goods.

<sup>65</sup> Judith Miller, *Miller's Twentieth Century Design* (London: Miller's 2009) pp.88-106

could browse around the furniture, choose their preferred style, and have it made on site to order, an unusual concept in the 1920s, but one which has since become a standard way to buy larger household goods.<sup>66</sup>

The inventory also gives a little insight into the garden leisure pursuits of the Mayers at Quarr. There was a 'Kum Back' tennis kit, for example - which, when assembled, created the chance to practice tennis without an opponent, - in addition to croquet, and 'clock golf' sets, all of which came from Harrods.<sup>67</sup>

During their time at Quarr, it would appear that Robert and Sarah indulged in the fashion for weekend entertaining, popular with the 'Bright Young People' as described by Pamela Horn and A. N. Wilson.<sup>68</sup> They invited friends and family to stay at the house, make use of the tennis court and gardens, and enjoy the surrounding countryside.<sup>69</sup> They also entertained riders after a local 'hunt' with no 'living quarry'.<sup>70</sup> Horn shows that the entertainments enjoyed by the Bright Young People were not always so civilised and sedate however, and were often alcohol and sometimes drug fuelled, as they indulged in relatively antisocial behaviour, driving their cars around London in the early hours on noisy 'treasure hunts'.<sup>71</sup> Even the Prince of Wales was known to have partaken on a particular night in 1924, where Gladys Cooper, Sarah's old work colleague, was also complicit.<sup>72</sup>

It is useful at this point to re-investigate the social set within which Sarah was operating whilst at Quarr. She was at the height of her social climb, living between the house in the country, and London. With research through public records, it is very difficult to establish a network of friends, other than those who have been used as witnesses on documentation for family events, however, this work has been privileged to have been given access to photographs held by the Mayer family dating from Sarah and Robert's time at Quarr. Within the collection, there are photographs of the couple with various people, both at the

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<sup>66</sup> Joanna Smith and Ray Rogers, *Behind the Veneer: The South Shoreditch Furniture Trade and its Buildings* (Swindon: English Heritage 2006) pp.22-30.

<sup>67</sup> Mayer, Inventory of goods.

<sup>68</sup> Horn, *Country House Society* pp.250-275; A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians* (London: Arrow Books 2006) pp.230-241.

<sup>69</sup> Photographs held in the Mayer Family Collection; Wilson, *After the Victorians* pp.230-241.

<sup>70</sup> 'Misinformed' *West Sussex Gazette* 10 April 1930 p.8.

<sup>71</sup> Horn, *Country House Society* p.258.

<sup>72</sup> 'Prince's Treasure Hunt' *Edinburgh Evening News* 26 July 1924 p.7.

house and in other locations. Some of the names of the friends have been very helpfully noted in the albums, and with some research I have been able to trace the backgrounds of a few of these acquaintances.

Examples of the names captioned with the photographs were Beryl Bowater, Maisie Patrick, Eileen Heaton, Douglas and Eileen Ingrams, and a woman named Bunt or Bunty. The owner of two of the albums, and the photographer, was Robert's younger brother Edward, and he appeared in one of the shots. Another album had belonged to Robert himself. Tracing a name, with no other details, for example, whether a female's name is her own or her husband's, is not without difficulty. However, with a few hypothetical assumptions, such as social class and wealth, it can become possible to narrow down the likely subjects. With Beryl Bowater, for instance, much like the method used to investigate Sarah initially, I gauged an approximate age from the photograph, and searched through the subscription website Ancestry.com for possible matches. The first Beryl Bowater to catch my attention in the listings was on the electoral registers in Westminster, London, in 1930.<sup>73</sup> The photograph I was using for identification was also dated 1930, and on accessing the electoral image, there were four people with the surname Bowater living at 35 Chester Square, S.W.1: Beryl Stuart, Ethel Anita, Frank Henry (Major), and Ian Frank. The next item which looked like a possible match was a passenger list of 1925, on the White Star Line's ship R.M.S. *Olympic*, from New York to Southampton, and this listed three of the same Bowater family, Frank H. aged fifty-nine, Ethel aged fifty-six, and Beryl aged twenty-two.<sup>74</sup> Further online investigation found Major Frank Henry Bowater to be a later baronet, and Lord Mayor of London. It was still not certain that this particular Beryl Bowater was the correct woman, but she appeared to be a good match for age and social status.

Other investigations of contemporary documents filled out some more details for this family, and I moved on to the other names. The epiphanic moment came when searching newspaper articles through the British Newspaper Archive for the subjects' names. In reports of the wedding of 'John Henry Enthoven' - also

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<sup>73</sup> Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Register, London, England, Beryl Stuart Bowater, St George's Ward, City of Westminster, 1930 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed March 2018).

<sup>74</sup> R.M.S. *Olympic*, Southampton, Arrival 14 August 1925, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed February 2018).

known as Tommy (actually Henry John), a Middlesex cricketer, and, like Robert, an old Harrovian - to Miss Margot Gulliland in 1929, amongst the bridesmaids listed were three of my research names: Miss Beryl Bowater, Miss Maisie Patrick, and Miss Buntie Seagar-Owens.<sup>75</sup> This placed Sarah and Robert into a very particular group of friends, and further research found the friends to be part of a 'set' who mostly lived in and around Chelsea.

Horn explains: 'The bright young set became particularly newsworthy... when they began to hold "themed" or "freak" fancy dress parties.'<sup>76</sup> A report on such a party held in 1931 in *Tatler*, named the Enthovens, Maisie Patrick, and Robert's brother Edward amongst attendees of an affair hosted by Miss Phoebe Norton-Griffiths, where all the men had to take a bottle of beer.<sup>77</sup> This seems to have been deemed hilarious, presumably because it wasn't champagne, and there was an iconic photograph of the group, all holding beer bottles, with the men in black tie, and the women in typical fashions of the day.<sup>78</sup>



A BEER-BOTTLE PARTY IN CHELSEA

A group of, let us suppose, good Froth-Blowers at a recent little entertainment arranged in classic Chelsea by Miss Phoebe Norton-Griffiths at her studio. The invitations demanded that gentlemen were to come armed with a "bottle of beer" and ladies to bring something between a "biscuit and a boar's head!" The group includes Sir Shirley and Lady Worthington-Evans, Mrs. J. H. Thorpe, Mr. and Mrs. T. Enthoven, Mr. and Mrs. Trowbridge Heaton, Miss Billy Royds, Miss Audrey Carr, Miss Maisie Patrick, Mr. Ivan and Miss Aileen Langton-May, Mr. Arthur Slattery, and Mr. Edward Mayer

10. 'A Beer Bottle Party in Chelsea' *Tatler* 9 December 1931.

<sup>75</sup> 'Cricketer's Wedding' *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 12 June 1929 p.12.

<sup>76</sup> Horn, *Country House Society* p.261.

<sup>77</sup> 'A Beer Bottle Party in Chelsea' *Tatler* 9 December 1931 p.54.

<sup>78</sup> 'A Beer Bottle Party in Chelsea' p.54.

Another of those pictured with Robert and Sarah in the Mayer family photographs, was Eileen Ingrams and her husband Douglas. They are also worthy of a brief description in this work, as they bring the couple towards a more political set. Douglas, otherwise known as A. D. Ingrams was listed in the telephone directory in 1928 as living at Paston Lodge, Brockenhurst.<sup>79</sup> This was only three miles or so from Quarr House. Eileen was the daughter of Edward Shortt, a British Cabinet Minister during Lloyd George's tenure as Prime Minister.<sup>80</sup> She was also the sister of Doreen Ingrams, who married Douglas's brother in 1930.<sup>81</sup> Doreen, who had begun her career as an actress, like Sarah also went on to become a pioneer as the 'first European woman to live and travel freely in the Hadhramaut in South Arabia'.<sup>82</sup> Douglas himself had been appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies as Agricultural Officer for Zanzibar.<sup>83</sup>

It could be considered whether Sarah and Robert were on the periphery of this group, and that these 'bright young things' were more directly friends of Edward, most of them being closer in age group to him, however, they were photographed with the couple at Quarr, some distance from London, implying a degree of commitment to a relationship on the friends' behalf.

Eileen Heaton, one of the friends photographed at Quarr, was found to have another connection with Sarah through her cousin, George Gordon Medlicott Vereker, who 'gave [a] display of European fencing' at the second annual display of the Budokwai in 1919.<sup>84</sup>

An additional consideration regarding Sarah and Robert's connection to this social group is their family backgrounds. Most of these socialites came from

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<sup>79</sup> G.P.O. British Phone Books (1880-1984) A. D. Ingrams, Brockenhurst, 1928, [online] <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> (accessed April 2018).

<sup>80</sup> Registrar General, 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 117, T.N.A.; Cameron Hazlehurst, Sally Whitehead and Christine Woodland (eds), *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900-1964* (London: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society 1996) p.325.

<sup>81</sup> Marriage Register Index, William H. Ingrams and Doreen Shortt, St Martin, June quarter 1930, 1a:1281, G.R.O.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Adams, 'Obituary: Doreen Ingrams' *The Independent* 30 July 1997 [online] <https://www.independent.co.uk> (accessed April 2018).

<sup>83</sup> Royal Botanical Gardens Kew, *List of Staffs of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office 1925) pp.69-85.

<sup>84</sup> 'Wielding "Saucepan Lids"' *Illustrated London News* 7 June 1919 p.18.

elite families and were a tight-knit group who had grown up together.<sup>85</sup> However, as seen from the inclusion of Gladys Cooper, actresses and the middle classes were not wholly excluded. Robert's education at Harrow was undoubtedly an influence however, and it is apparent that he was simply mixing with and entertaining his peers.

As well as being a country weekend hostess, Sarah joined the local Women's Institute (W.I.) in Sway, and took over organisation of theatrical entertainments, entering the second National Institute drama competition with a show she produced in 1933, and winning a Silver Cup for a tableau she choreographed.<sup>86</sup> During a research trip to the village it was discovered that, in 1933, the Sway W.I. group, put together 'A History of Sway' and the inside front and rear covers of the book were decorated with original drawings by Sarah representing stylised images of the animals of The New Forest.<sup>87</sup>



11. Images by Sarah Mayer from *A History of Sway* (Sway Women's Institute 1933) reproduced by kind permission of Sway Women's Institute.

<sup>85</sup> D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation* (London: Vintage 2008) p.2.

<sup>86</sup> Records of Sway Women's Institute 1918-1939, held at Sway Village Hall, Hampshire, UK; Inez Jenkins, *The History of the Women's Institute of England and Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1953) p.126.

<sup>87</sup> Sway Women's Institute, *A History of Sway* 1933, held with Records of Sway Women's Institute at Sway Village Hall, Hampshire, UK.



It is interesting to reflect on the fact that the images she produced were very much of the modern *Art Deco* style; yet by being involved in the project, she perhaps showed an interest in history and tradition, a collocation which seems to have been embraced by the women of the Sway W.I.

Formed in Britain in 1915, Lorna Gibson explains that,

‘The original aim [of the W.I.] was to provide a female counterpart to the male-dominated British Agricultural Organisation Society ... founded in 1901 to promote cooperation amongst farmers, smallholders and growers, to increase agricultural production.’<sup>88</sup>

The Women’s Institute purported to be an egalitarian group, other than, of course, the lack of male participants, although as Gibson describes, the stereotypical picture of jam making and the singing of *Jerusalem* ‘conjures up images of middle-class women’.<sup>89</sup> Caitriona Beaumont considers a wider class base was included in the meetings:

‘The W.I. was successful in its aim of attracting both working-class and middle-class members. However, ... the leadership of the organisation remained firmly in the hands of educated middle-class women.’<sup>90</sup>

Despite the inherent social structure within the leadership, there was, on the face of it, no place for class-based elitism.<sup>91</sup> Jane Robinson tells us, ‘It’s the very nature of the W.I. that social and intellectual hierarchies cannot exist (ostensibly, at least) within its constitution.’<sup>92</sup>

However, if a classless society was something of which Sarah approved, then it did not apply to the running of a large estate. Over the five years before her departure to Japan, there were a series of advertisements made in *The Times* and local newspaper *The Western Gazette*, for servants to be employed at the

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<sup>88</sup> Lorna Gibson, ‘The Women’s Institute and Jerusalem’s Suffrage Past,’ *Women’s History Review* 15:2 (2006) p.325, DOI:10.1080/09612020500529846.

<sup>89</sup> Gibson, ‘Women’s Institute’ p.324.

<sup>90</sup> Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1928-1964* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2013) p.25.

<sup>91</sup> Jenkins, *History of the Women’s Institute* p.42.

<sup>92</sup> Jane Robinson, *A Force to be Reckoned with: A History of the Women’s Institute* (London; Virago Press 2011) p.29.

house.<sup>93</sup> In 1929 an experienced cook and an upper housemaid were required.<sup>94</sup> In 1930, Sarah placed an advertisement in *The Times* asking, in a similar way to when she was staffing Three Wishes, for a married couple. This time she wanted them 'Really Reliable' and to work as 'Cook [and] Butler-Valet', stating that three other maids were kept.<sup>95</sup> In 1933, an advert for a sixteen-year-old 'between maid' appeared.<sup>96</sup>

Once hired, it would appear that the Mayers did not experience a high turnover of staff. This may have been due to the couple being away from Quarr during the week, which allowed the servants some degree of freedom. Evidence was found of the house being left vacant, confirming that Sarah was spending time away. In 1930 there was a break in at the house by two young soldiers who were posted at the new barracks in Gosport. The newspaper report claimed that they had 'deserted their regiment and wandered to Sway', where they found themselves at Quarr, which was described as 'an unoccupied house'.<sup>97</sup> It was quite a walk, as Sway is roughly forty miles from Gosport, but the two eighteen year olds, it was reported, filled up on the available food, polished off a bottle of champagne, and were arrested the following day at New Milton.<sup>98</sup>

Sarah's weekdays spent away from Quarr, leaving it empty for unexpected visitors, took her back to London, closer to friends and family. Her time at Quarr would seem to have encapsulated the perfect existence in inter-war Britain, with enough money to avoid the need to work; a large, spacious home with servants to attend to every whim; and a vibrant group of friends with their toes dipped in court, politics and society. But Sarah was developing another interest, and it was at the Budokwai in London that her new passion, judo, the central theme of this work, was based.

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<sup>93</sup> Examples include 'Married Couples and Menservants' *The Times* 11 April 1930 p.3; 'Situations Vacant' *Western Gazette* 26 July 1929 p.8.

<sup>94</sup> 'Situations Vacant' *Western Gazette* 12 July 1929 p.8.

<sup>95</sup> 'Married Couples and Menservants' *The Times* 11 April 1930 p.3.

<sup>96</sup> 'Situations Vacant' *Western Gazette* 3 March 1933 p.8.

<sup>97</sup> 'Young Soldiers and Champagne' *Hampshire Telegraph* 1 August 1930 p.19.

<sup>98</sup> 'Young Soldiers and Champagne' p.19.

### 3.4 Judo in London 1926-1933

This section partly pre-dates the previous. Here we investigate the circumstances under which Sarah, as a modern society hostess spent a proportion of her leisure time in London, studying traditional Japanese culture and a sporting phenomenon which was by its nature rough and 'masculine'.<sup>99</sup> During the inter-war years, there were still concerns over women participating in so-called masculine sports. As Skillen explains: 'At a time when the female body was becoming a focal point for modernity, it was not just the physical impact of sport that concerned doctors and educators alike. The psychological influence of these activities was also an area of concern'.<sup>100</sup>

It was some twenty years earlier, at the turn of the twentieth century that *jūjutsu* or judo first became popular in Britain. This popularity was partly due to Japan's defeat of the Russian forces in the Russo-Japanese War. It was considered that the peculiarly Japanese methods of fighting were responsible for Japan's superiority, creating great interest in these 'scientific' techniques.<sup>101</sup>

*The Gloucestershire Echo* reported that 'The war has given an impetus to ju-jitsu'.<sup>102</sup> In *JuJitsu Combat Tricks* published in 1904, Hancock stated:

'The physical performances of the Japanese in their war with Russia should be sufficient to establish even seemingly extravagant claims for the value of jiu-jitsu as the best system of bodily training known to the world.'<sup>103</sup>

But curiosity in the art had begun four or five years earlier. In 1899, Yukio Tani came to England for the first time to work in the music halls with manager and founder of 'Bartitsu', Edward Barton-Wright. He travelled from Japan initially

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<sup>99</sup> Nathalie Koivula, 'Perceived Characteristics of Sports Categorized as Gender-Neutral, Feminine or Masculine,' *Journal of Sport Behaviour* 24 (2001) pp.377-393.

<sup>100</sup> Fiona Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain Volume 2* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2013) p.44.

<sup>101</sup> Yorimitsu Hashimoto, 'Soft Power of the Soft Art: Jiu-Jitsu in the British Empire of the Early 20th Century,' *International Research Centre for Japanese Studies* [International Symposium Kyoto] 38 (2011) pp.72-73 [online] [https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/repo/ouka/all/27407/38thirs\\_69.pdf](https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/repo/ouka/all/27407/38thirs_69.pdf) (accessed March 2018); Michel Brousse and David Matsumoto, *Judo in the U.S.* (Berkeley California: North Atlantic Books 2003) pp.21-22; Michel Brousse and Nicolas Messner, *Judo for the World* (Budapest: International Judo Federation 2015) p.47.

<sup>102</sup> 'The Miscellany' *Gloucestershire Echo* 11 April 1904 p.1.

<sup>103</sup> Harry Irving Hancock, *Jiu-jitsu Combat Tricks* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1904) p.v.

with his brother and was joined later by a man named Yamamoto.<sup>104</sup> The latter two men soon returned home, but Tani stayed on. Another Japanese *jūjutsuka* who worked briefly with Barton-Wright was Uyenishi Sadakazu, known on the stage as Raku.<sup>105</sup> He began to teach women such as Phoebe Roberts and Emily Watts in the early 1900s, and is quoted as saying:

“Balance and quickness will always win, and women are always quick. When a great storm sweeps through the forest the heavy and sturdy trees suffer most. The smaller plants possessing plenty of elasticity can withstand the storm because they offer the least resistance to the opposing force. It is so with Ju-jitsu. It is the only system in the world which could enable an ordinary woman to defeat a strong man.”<sup>106</sup>

Thus, judo or *jūjutsu* was being marketed to women as well as men, with newspaper headlines like ‘Jujitsu, the Art by which a Woman can Throw the Strongest Man.’<sup>107</sup> In 1904, American author H. Irving Hancock released a book entitled *Physical Training for Women by Japanese Methods*, dedicated to ‘The American Woman and to her English Sister’. In 1905, Phoebe Roberts was demonstrating at Buckingham Palace along with Japanese male *jūjutsuka*, for a visit by Prince and Princess Arisugawa of Japan.<sup>108</sup> In that same year, *The Lady’s Realm* held a chapter on ‘Jujitsu for Ladies’ giving a fascinating insight into the early lessons for women in Britain held by Uyenishi.<sup>109</sup>

Uyenishi, produced a book himself in 1906 entitled *The Text Book of Ju Jutsu as Practised in Japan*.<sup>110</sup> In that same year, Emily Watts wrote *The Fine Art of*

<sup>104</sup> William Bankier, *Ju-jitsu: What it Really is* (London: Apollo’s Magazine 1905) p.19; Richard Bowen, *100 Years of Judo in Great Britain Volume 1* (Brighton: IndePenPress 2011) p.76; *Kanagawa Maru*, Arrival October 1900, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed February 2018); For more on Yamamoto including theories on his identity, see, Bartitsuka, ‘The Original BJJ: New Discoveries and Speculations re. the Submission Grappling of British Jiu-Jitsu,’ [online] <http://www.bartitsu.org> (accessed March 2018).

<sup>105</sup> ‘Japanese Wrestlers at the “Empire”’ *Pall Mall Gazette* 1 October 1901 p.7; ‘“Raku” at the Town Hall’ *Dover Express* 13 September 1907 p.8.

<sup>106</sup> ‘The Miscellany’ *Gloucestershire Echo* 11 April 1904 p.1.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Jujitsu’ *Cornubian and Redruth Times* 6 February 1904 p.7; ‘For Women Who Walk Alone’ *The Sketch* 12 April 1905 p.13.

<sup>108</sup> H. Irving Hancock, *Physical Training for Women by Japanese Methods* (New York and London: G P Putnam’s Sons 1904); ‘Our Japanese Guests’ *London Daily News* 28 June 1905 p.7.

<sup>109</sup> Annesley Kenealy, ‘Jujitsu for Ladies’ *Lady’s Realm* May-October 1905 pp.291-296.

<sup>110</sup> Uyenishi Sadakazu, *The Text Book of JuJutsu as Practised in Japan* (London: Health and Strength 1906).

*Jujutsu*.<sup>111</sup> Uyenishi's book retailed at 2s-6d, whereas, the work of his pupil, with its introduction by Sir Thomas Lauder Brunton and dedication to Mary, Duchess of Bedford was perhaps aimed at the wealthier reader at 6s.<sup>112</sup>

It was reported in 1905 that the all-female Cambridge colleges of Girton and Newnham were to begin *jūjutsu* classes.<sup>113</sup> Women in society were holding parties in the drawing room, where the heavily corseted ladies in floor length dresses learnt how to defend themselves from attack.<sup>114</sup>



12. 'The Latest Drawing Room Craze' *The Sphere* 26 August 1905.

*The Bournemouth Daily Echo* even prophesied 'that the science will become more popular among Englishwomen than among Englishmen.'<sup>115</sup>

The demonstration and teaching of *jūjutsu* in the first decade of the century by women such as Roberts and Watts, helped to cement the idea of the art as feminine as well as masculine in the minds of the British.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Mrs Roger Watts, *The Fine Art of Jujutsu* (London: Heinemann, 1906).

<sup>112</sup> 'Sport' *The Graphic* 17 November 1906 p.56.

<sup>113</sup> 'Ju-jitsu and Ladies' *Banbury Advertiser* 30 November 1905 p.2; 'Ju-Jitsu' *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 30 December 1905 p.423.

<sup>114</sup> 'The Latest Drawing Room Craze' *The Sphere* 26 August 1905 p.189.

<sup>115</sup> 'From All Quarters' *Bournemouth Echo* 25 November 1905 p.2.

<sup>116</sup> Mike Callan, Conor Heffernan and Amanda Spenn, 'Women's Jūjutsu and Judo in the Early Twentieth Century,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 35:6 (2018) pp.530-556



13. Image from, Taro Miyake and Yukio Tani, *The Game of Ju-Jitsu: For the Use of Schools and Colleges* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1906).

As the first decade of the twentieth century moved to its close, a more focused use for the 'yielding' self-defence techniques had emerged, as Edith Garrud, who had also begun her training with Uyenishi, taught some of the more militant members of the suffrage movement, and by 1913 the so-called 'bodyguard' of the suffragette leadership, how to defend the cause.<sup>117</sup>

Kay notes the two schools of thought by historians around suffrage and sport: firstly, the use of sport by women to help facilitate emancipation; and secondly, that sportswomen had no interest in political gain.<sup>118</sup> Schultz coins the phrase 'Physical Activism', an amalgamation of physical activity and political activism 'striking simultaneous blows to the myths of women's physical and political inferiority'.<sup>119</sup>

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DOI:10.1080/09523367.2018.1544553; 'Novel Ju-Jitsu Demonstration' *Sporting Life* 21 December 1904 p.6; 'Ju-Jitsu' *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 30 December 1905 Issue 2327 p.423.

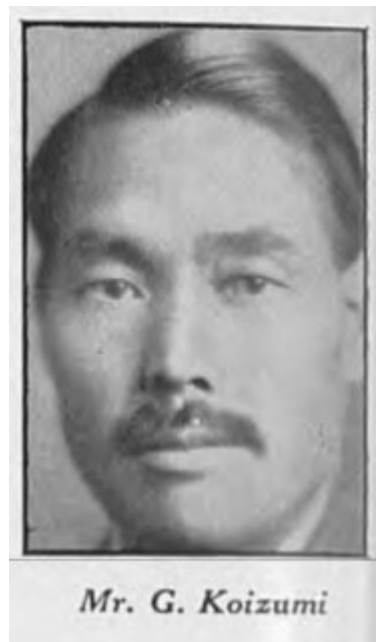
<sup>117</sup> Callan, Heffernan and Spenn, 'Women's Jūjutsu' pp.530-553; Emelyne Godfrey, 'The Rise of the Jujitsu-Suffragettes: Martial Arts in fin-de-siècle Great Britain,' (paper presented at Asia House for the Bagri Foundation, 19 May 2016); Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London and New York: Routledge 2001) p.240; Edith Garrud, 'Self-Defence' *Votes for Women* 4 March 1910 p.355.

<sup>118</sup> Joyce Kay, 'It Wasn't Just Emily Davison!: Sport, Suffrage and Society in Edwardian Britain,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25:10 (2008) pp.1338-1354.

<sup>119</sup> Jaime Schultz, 'The Physical is Political' in Roberta J. Park and Patricia Vertinsky (eds), *Women, Sport, Society: Further Reflections, Reaffirming Mary Wollstencraft* (New York: Routledge, 2011) p.29.

Following the First World War, it would appear that British women began to see *jūjutsu*, or judo as it was becoming known, as a form of physical recreation, as well as self-defence, and the Budokwai, which first opened in 1918, aimed at expatriate Japanese, welcomed a growing number of white upper-middle-class women.<sup>120</sup> Osborne and Skillen consider that 'the number of private and public sports facilities grew on an unprecedented scale during the inter-war years' and the Budokwai, although concentrating on Japanese culture, fits into this construction.<sup>121</sup>

The Budokwai was founded by Gunji Koizumi, at Lower Grosvenor Place, close to Buckingham Palace, and the head coach was later to become Yukio Tani.<sup>122</sup>



14. 'Mr. G. Koizumi' *The Sphere* 17 September 1927.

Research carried out by Brian Goodger in 1981, shows that, in January 1920 the Society was actively encouraging female participation using newspaper

<sup>120</sup> Brian Goodger, 'The Development of Judo in Britain: A Sociological Study' (Thesis for Ph.D., University of London 1981) p.135.

<sup>121</sup> Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen, 'Women and Sport in Interwar Britain' in Jennifer Hargreaves and Eric Anderson (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge 2014) p.52.

<sup>122</sup> Mike Callan, 'History of the Budokwai, London: The Adoption of Kōdōkan Judo in the Early Years,' (paper presented at 4th European Science of Judo Research Symposium & 3rd Scientific and Professional Conference on Judo, Porec, Croatia 12 June 2017); Alan Fromm and Nicolas Soames, *Judo: The Gentle Way* (London: Routledge 1982) p.8.

articles to 'attract attention' where the dominant theme was 'the value of Judo ... as a form of self-defence, specifically for women.'<sup>123</sup>

A document found at The Bowen Collection headed 'Appendix: List of the first members of the Budokwai ... from 28 January 1918 to circa April 1929' shows that, in 1920 there were forty new male members and twenty-four new female. This compares with 1919, where twenty men and two women joined.<sup>124</sup> The names, dates and membership numbers in this document are mostly corroborated by other Budokwai contemporary papers also held in the collection, although there are some differences, for instance in the listing titled 'Membership of The Budokwai Prior to the Year of Formation of Nihon Bujutsu Limited', Sarah is listed as number 267 rather than 216, as in the 'Appendix'.<sup>125</sup> However, the evidence includes her as part of a growing number of women participating.

The 'Appendix' document shows Sarah joining the Budokwai in January 1926. There was then another entry for her as number 275 in November 1927. This may account for the differences between the two documents referred to above. As we have seen, between those two dates Sarah was moving out of the bungalow in Surrey and considering a potential new life in South Africa. However, by February 1927 the couple were once again living in London.

Other documents were found in The Bowen Collection relating to Sarah, including one listing her as a 1930 pupil of the Budokwai, and a debenture document, dated 12 August 1931, from when the Society formed a company, with members taking £1 shares.<sup>126</sup> In the 'Allotment of Membership Numbers' she was allocated number 108.<sup>127</sup> This shows a certain amount of commitment from Sarah, and it is clear that she was showing an interest and engaging with the Society.

As the figures show, Sarah was not the first or only woman to train at the Budokwai. Between 1918 and 1929, there would appear to have been forty-four

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<sup>123</sup> Goodger, 'Development of Judo' p.97.

<sup>124</sup> Bowen 'Appendix'.

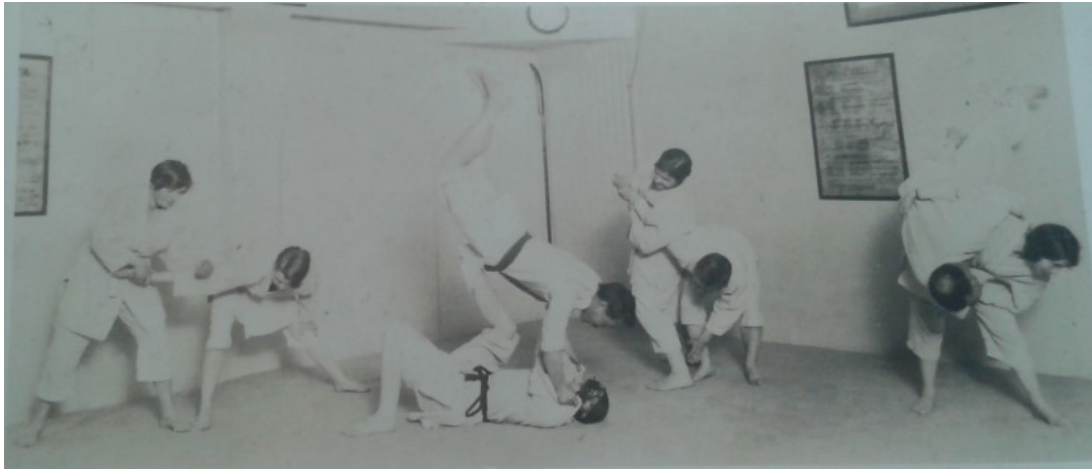
<sup>125</sup> The Budokwai, Nihon Bujutsu Limited, Record of Instruction and Membership etc., B.66 p.23, R.B.C.

<sup>126</sup> The Budokwai, Nihon Bujutsu Limited, Record of Instruction and Membership; Sarah Benedict Mayer, Papers and Correspondence regarding Applications for Membership of Nihon Bujutsu Ltd, 1929-1933, B.67-76, R.B.C.

<sup>127</sup> The Budokwai, Nihon Bujutsu Limited, Record of Instruction and Membership.



women who enrolled. However, other evidence, including signing in books, Sarah's letters from Japan and photographs held at The Bowen Collection, show that far fewer practised at the same time.<sup>128</sup>



15. Photograph of the Ladies' Session at the Budokwai, c. 1930, reproduced by kind permission of The Richard Bowen Collection.

Neither was Sarah the most highly ranked female during that period. The Budokwai system of grades at the time consisted of beginners at fifth *kyū*, leading to first *kyū*, before moving on to a first '*dan*' grade, or black belt.<sup>129</sup> In the same year as Sarah attained fourth *kyū*, Beatrice Woolhouse and Eva Anderson were both awarded a first *dan* and Marjorie Rée gained second *kyū*, along with three others.<sup>130</sup> Rée was also used in newspaper articles to promote the ladies' classes in 1930, with photographs of her placing an arm-lock and strangle hold on Koizumi.<sup>131</sup> Sarah does not seem to have been used by the Budokwai at any point for promotion or publicity, even after her Japanese success.

The backgrounds of other women training at the Budokwai during this period, where possible, have been researched, building on Goodger's work, to establish the main social strata within which they lived, illustrating both the type of woman attracted to judo in London, and therefore, with whom Sarah was

<sup>128</sup> Bowen 'Appendix'. For evidence of numbers practicing in the *dōjō* see, Photograph of Budokwai Ladies' Section, (approximately 1930) undated and uncatalogued, R.B.C.; Letter 4, Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gungi, 12 September 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>129</sup> Mike Callan, 'History of the Grading System,' (paper presented at the British Judo Association Senior Examiners Conference, Walsall, UK, May 2015).

<sup>130</sup> Minutes of The Budokwai Committee Meetings 1932-1940, B.9, p.2, R.B.C.

<sup>131</sup> 'Ju-Jitsu Girls' *Nottingham Evening Post* 4 February 1930 p.7; 'Where East is West' *The Sphere* 8 February 1930 p.34.

mixing at the Society. Names of the women were extrapolated from the list of members from 1918-1929. As seen with the research of people in the photographs of Sarah and Robert, a simple name does not initially uncover much information, however, some evidence was found, again using genealogical techniques, thus revealing that some of the women were well known contemporary figures.

The first woman to be researched was Katherine Augusta White Cooper. In 1918 she was the first female, and sixtieth person, to join the Budokwai, becoming a member in 1919.<sup>132</sup> She was the daughter of William George Owen White Cooper and Catherine Clarissa.<sup>133</sup> William was a physician living in South Kensington.<sup>134</sup>

Lady Susan Stirling Ridsdale who joined in January 1920 was the ninth female member.<sup>135</sup> She was the wife of Sir Edward Aurelian Ridsdale, a British Liberal politician, who was, in turn, the brother of Lucy Ridsdale, the wife of the British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who first came to office in 1923.<sup>136</sup> Lady Susan was painted by Philip Edward Burne-Jones in 1908.<sup>137</sup> She died in 1935.<sup>138</sup>

Miss Aga Berindei joined in March 1920 and was the granddaughter of former Romanian Minister for War, General Anton Berindei.<sup>139</sup> Miss Nan B. Nelson also joined in March 1920.<sup>140</sup> She was married to George A. Nelson.<sup>141</sup> They travelled extensively from the 1930s to the 1950s, and she died on 11 May 1957, a resident of The Dorchester Hotel on Park Lane in London. She was a widow, with effects totalling £254,425-13s-1d.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Gunji Koizumi, *Budokwai Dōjō Diary*, 3 October 1918, C.13, R.B.C.; Bowen, 'Appendix'.

<sup>133</sup> Baptismal Record, Katherine Augusta White Cooper, St Stephens, Kensington, London, 1898, p84/ste/001, L.M.A.

<sup>134</sup> Registrar General, 1901 England Census, Class RG13, Piece 35, Folio 148, p.3, T.N.A.

<sup>135</sup> Bowen, 'Appendix'.

<sup>136</sup> 'Lady Ridsdale' *The Times* 11 June 1935 p.14; Stuart Ball, 'Baldwin, Stanley, first Earl Baldwin of Bewdley,' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

<sup>137</sup> Art UK, 'Lady Susan Stirling Ridsdale,' [online] <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/lady-susan-stirling-ridsdale-181541> (accessed March 2018).

<sup>138</sup> 'Lady Ridsdale' *The Times* 11 June 1935 p.14.

<sup>139</sup> Bowen, 'Appendix'; Frances Brown, 'Romanian Folk Tales' *Folklore* 26:3 (30 September 1915) p.296.

<sup>140</sup> Bowen 'Appendix'.

<sup>141</sup> Registrar General, 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 1184, T.N.A.

<sup>142</sup> Principal Probate Registry, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) Nannie Blackwood Nelson, 1957 [online] <https://www.Ancestry.co.uk/> (accessed March 2018).

Ethel Nettleship joined in October 1920 and was part of a well-known family.<sup>143</sup> She was a concert cellist and a lace designer, and her father was a member of The Brotherhood, a group of artists who were admirers of William Blake.<sup>144</sup> Her sister Ida was perhaps the most famous of the family, and married the artist, Augustus John.<sup>145</sup>

Finally, Marjorie Rée joined in February 1928.<sup>146</sup> She was the daughter of an hotelier in St Leonards Sussex, with 115 rooms.<sup>147</sup> She became Mrs. George Hermann Henson in 1931 and died on Christmas Eve in 1973.<sup>148</sup>

These are just a few of the women who may have practised at the Budokwai at the same time as Sarah. There was a mix of political, artistic, and trade backgrounds, but all who were traced seemed to have had a certain amount of wealth or social standing. This not only agrees with the research carried out by Goodger in 1981, where a determination of the socio-economic status of the members was based on the addresses and occupations given by the membership, but shows a correlation between the group with whom Sarah and Robert mixed socially, and the people she would have come across at judo practice in London.<sup>149</sup>

Sarah was not the first female member of her family to enthuse about a form of fitness, and she may have inherited her desire to improve herself physically, from her mother. Alice was an advocate of physical culture and exercise for women. In the interview with Alice, written in 1902 whilst she and Alfred were in Australia, the matter of women's bodies, and the change in fashions was discussed:

‘The site of a Sandow apparatus in the door leads to a remark about physical culture. “Yes,” says Mrs. Tapping, “I go in for physical culture, since my husband has bought the apparatus. We have very little chance of

<sup>143</sup> Bowen ‘Appendix’; Registrar General, 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 524, T.N.A.

<sup>144</sup> R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats, A Life: 1 The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998) p.12.

<sup>145</sup> For information on Ida Nettleship see, Rebecca John and Michael Holroyd (eds), *The Good Bohemian: The Letters of Ida John* (London and New York: Bloomsbury 2017)

<sup>146</sup> Bowen ‘Appendix’.

<sup>147</sup> Registrar General, 1911 England Census, Class RG14, Piece 4751, T.N.A.

<sup>148</sup> Marriage Register Index, George Henson and Marjorie Rée, Poole, June quarter 1931, 5a:694, G.R.O.; Principal Probate Registry, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) Marjorie Henson, 1973 [online] <https://www.Ancestry.co.uk/> (accessed March 2018).

<sup>149</sup> Goodger, ‘Development of Judo’ pp.108-122.

exercise with the exception of walking, so I think ten minutes or so Sandow exercise of a morning is excellent. I think it is really owing to the preaching and teaching of Sandow and the advocates of physical culture that the great and sensible change in women's figures has come about. How great the change is can scarcely be realised until a figure of the old order with its stiff, trussed up look is met. It is wonderful how women endured the torture so long without revolt. I am sure that most of the distortion of figure so many middle-aged women suffer from is the result of unwise compression and unsuitable corsets.'<sup>150</sup>

Sandow was a physical culturist from the late Victorian and Edwardian period, who was a master marketeer, and contributed greatly to the emerging concept of fitness as recreation and improvement of mind and body.<sup>151</sup> He toured the Antipodes in 1902/1903, so there was enhanced interest in his techniques and equipment while Alice was in Australia.<sup>152</sup> Some twenty-five years later, Sarah was fortunate that her recreation took place in an era when corsetry had somewhat relaxed.

In January 1932, at the ceremony where Sarah achieved her fourth *kyu*, also receiving the same rank were Mr. C. Humphreys and possibly his wife, a Mrs. Humphreys.<sup>153</sup> Christmas Humphreys, who later became a prominent member of the legal profession, was a great advocate of Eastern culture in Britain, and in 1924 he founded the Buddhist Society, then known as the London Buddhist Society.<sup>154</sup>

Humphreys had a further connection with Sarah, this time related to Robert. In 1929 Humphreys, a barrister at the time, wrote a book chronicling an infamous

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<sup>150</sup> 'Miss Alice Farleigh at Home' *Table Talk* (Melbourne) 14 August 1902 p.21 [online] <https://trove.nla.gov.au> (accessed December 2017).

<sup>151</sup> C. Daley, 'Selling Sandow Modernity and Leisure in Early Twentieth-Century New Zealand,' *New Zealand Journal of History* 34:2 (2000) pp.241-261; Mark Pottle, 'Sandow, Eugen (1867-1925), Strongman and Physical Culturist,' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

<sup>152</sup> Diana Looser, 'Radical Bodies and Dangerous Ladies: Martial Arts and Women's Performance, 1900-1918,' *Theatre Research International* 36:1 (Mar. 2010) pp.3-19.

<sup>153</sup> Minutes of The Budokwai Committee Meetings 1932-1940, B.9, p.2, R.B.C.

<sup>154</sup> Christmas Humphreys (1901-1983) Compiled by Robert Kitto, Trustee, The Blavatsky Trust. [online] <http://www.blavatskytrust.org.uk> (accessed 31 May 2016); Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2014) p.365.

crime called *The Great Pearl Robbery of 1913: A Record of Fact*.<sup>155</sup> The robbery had taken place between Paris and London, and involved the theft of a pearl necklace, thought to be the most valuable ever produced, which belonged to Robert's father Max.<sup>156</sup>

The fact that Humphreys and his wife achieved the same rank in judo at the Budokwai, at the same time as Sarah, and that he wrote a substantial book on a trial based around Robert's father, strongly suggests a connection between the two couples. Like Robert, he was also called to the Bar through the Inner Temple, although two years earlier, in 1924.<sup>157</sup> It is possible that Humphreys' attention was once again drawn to The Great Pearl Robbery in 1928/9 by his judo associations with Sarah. There has been no further evidence found of their relationship, although his book mentions acknowledgement of Robert's brother Percy, who provided information regarding pearls.<sup>158</sup> Humphreys was to become Assistant Prosecutor for the war crimes trials held in post-Second World War Tokyo and had a high profile, which presents further evidence of the elite social circles within which Sarah was placed between the wars.<sup>159</sup>

Although Sarah enjoyed the acquaintance of those from a high socio-economic background whilst studying judo in London, the evidence shows that she was not one of the key players and was perhaps an unlikely candidate for the pioneering adventure that awaited her. However, her interest in judo, and, as she stated in a later interview, her life-long curiosity regarding the 'history and traditions' of Japan, seems to have given her the impetus to leave behind her life in the country to undertake the long journey to the Far East as, what could perhaps best be described, a sports tourist.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Christmas Humphreys, *The Great Pearl Robbery of 1913: A Record of Fact* (London: William Heinemann Ltd 1929).

<sup>156</sup> Molly Caldwell Crosby, *The Great Pearl Heist: London's Greatest Thief and Scotland Yard's Hunt for The World's Most Valuable Necklace* (New York: Berkley Books 2012) p.4.

<sup>157</sup> Frederick Lawton, revised by M. C. Curthoys, 'Humphreys, (Travers) Christmas (1901–1983)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

<sup>158</sup> Humphreys, *The Great Pearl Robbery* p.37.

<sup>159</sup> Yuma Totani, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: The Pursuit of Justice in the Wake of World War II* (Harvard: Harvard University Asia Center 2009) p.68.

<sup>160</sup> 'Brains Against Brawn' *Gloucester Advocate* (N.S.W.) 24 January 1936 p.4 [online] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/> (accessed March 2018).

### 3.5 Travel to Japan 1933-1934

In the first of Sarah's communications to Koizumi, sent on 7 February 1934 from Calcutta, she said 'I shall arrange for Thos. Cook - Tokyo - to send letters to me wherever I am', implying that the travel company were involved in the administration of her journey.<sup>161</sup> This section draws on a combination of three main sources to piece together the complex voyage taken by Sarah from England to Japan, this first letter in the set; archival holdings at Thomas Cook; and historical passenger lists. This helps to give an understanding of both the original reasons for, and Sarah's attitude to, the trip which ended up becoming so important in terms of women's judo and sporting history. This section also begins the investigation into how Sarah's journey can inform debates around the movement and migration of not only people, but their philosophies, considering the influence on, or conversely, the effect of, individuals in their new environments.<sup>162</sup>

Although this letter describing Sarah's journey holds seemingly trivial information, this is the first point at which we hear Sarah's own voice. With the fragmentary evidence available, as one of only seven letters which give evidence of her own thoughts and the persona she was projecting, it would be remiss not to include it within this thesis, which seeks to discover the motivations and contextual positioning of this sporting pioneer.

On 21 December 1933, aged thirty-seven, Sarah left Robert and Quarr House behind to travel to Japan.<sup>163</sup> There has been no conclusive evidence found from the time leading up to the trip to confirm any definitive causes for her decision to leave her life and her husband behind, albeit temporarily. It is important to consider whether she had planned the trip as a self-conscious attempt to place herself at the vanguard of women's judo progression and development, or whether it was simply conceived as a distraction from everyday life at Quarr.

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<sup>161</sup> Letter One, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi, 7 February 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>162</sup> For example see, Lynn Abrams and Karen Hunt, 'Borders and Frontiers in Women's History,' *Women's History Review*, 9:2 (2000) pp.191-200; Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World* (Canberra: The Australian National University 2008); Patricia A Schechter, *Exploring the Decolonial Imaginary: Four Transnational Lives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

<sup>163</sup> S.S. *City of Baroda*, Liverpool, Departure 21 December 1933, UK Outward Passenger Lists 1890-1960 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed April 2018).

Did Sarah see herself as an adventurer or a wealthy, cossetted traveller?<sup>164</sup> Sarah's writings, both in her letters and subsequent articles, relate to those by other female travellers such as Isabella Bird or Audrey Harris.<sup>165</sup> As Speake observes,

'What is particularly interesting about the writing of [these] women ... is the disparity between their lives in bourgeois British Society and the freedom of movement, both physical and psychological, that they were able to enjoy when traveling.'<sup>166</sup>

In Jane Robinson's book of *Wayward Women*, she quotes Isabella Bird as having said 'Travellers are privileged to do the most improper things', noting herself that 'Travel meant leaving precedent behind and, quite simply, starting again'.<sup>167</sup>

Leaving Liverpool on the Ellerman City and Hall Line ship, the S.S. *City of Baroda*, Sarah's first section of the journey was to Bombay.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> For information on female travel see, Jennifer Speake (ed), *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2013); Patricia D. Netzley, *The Encyclopedia of Women's Travel and Exploration* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press 2001); Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1990).

<sup>165</sup> Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (London: John Murray 1880); Audrey Harris, *Eastern Visas* (London: Collins 1939).

<sup>166</sup> Speake, *Literature of Travel* p.xiv.

<sup>167</sup> Robinson, *Wayward Women* pp.83 and 78.

<sup>168</sup> S.S. *City of Baroda*, Liverpool, Departure 21 December 1933, UK Outward Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed April 2018).



16. Postcard of S.S. *City of Baroda*, Author's own collection.

In the 'Summary of British and Alien Passengers' there were only twenty-nine on board.<sup>169</sup> The ship was part cargo, and part passenger vessel, and could accommodate a hundred people for the month-long journey. Six unaccompanied men joined four couples and their children. Sarah was one of eleven unaccompanied women aboard. Only one of the travellers was not British, listed as a forty-year-old 'oil driller' from the USA.<sup>170</sup> According to the *Oriental Traveller's Gazette* from 1933, the price of Sarah's single journey from England to India would have been 493 rupees, equivalent to around £37, which equated to around £2,411.00 in 2016, using the RPI.<sup>171</sup>

The name of the Captain on the *City of Baroda* was Herbert Percival and a listing in *The London Gazette* from 1942 shows that he went on to be awarded the O.B.E. for services during the Second World War.<sup>172</sup> He had been 'in command' of various ships owned by the line for over twenty years, and he and Sarah quickly became friends. As her first letter back to Koizumi shows, the

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<sup>169</sup> S.S. *City of Baroda*, Liverpool, 1933.

<sup>170</sup> S.S. *City of Baroda*, Liverpool, 1933.

<sup>171</sup> The *Oriental Traveller's Gazette* 1933, Thomas Cook Archives, Peterborough, UK; Measuring Worth [online] <https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> (accessed April 2016)

<sup>172</sup> 'To be an Additional Officer of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire' *London Gazette* 28 August 1942 Issue 35688 p.3820.



'physical and psychological' freedoms to which Speake referred were manifest almost immediately.<sup>173</sup>

'I had a lovely time on the ship coming out. I sat next to the captain who was a most attractive person and he was most attentive. He moved me out of my cabin and gave me the best one on the ship and we had a lovely swimming bath and swam all day and danced every night, so I enjoyed myself thoroughly. If all the captains I meet are so kind to me, I shall never want to come back.'<sup>174</sup>

The ship travelled through the hotly contested territory of the Suez Canal.<sup>175</sup> Valeska Huber notes, 'After its opening in 1869, the Canal developed into a thoroughfare carrying not only information and goods but also individuals and their ideas.'<sup>176</sup> With Sarah, we can see the manifestation of this from a sporting perspective. She was the first woman to have ever travelled from Britain to Japan to study judo, and the evidence shows that she was to have a profound effect on how the judo establishment viewed women in their sport.

At the end of the canal, the ship sailed for Port Sudan and then across the Arabian Sea to the final destination of Ballard Pier in Bombay.<sup>177</sup> This brings the first consideration of one of the themes of the thesis: whether Sarah was naïve or brave to undertake this journey. According to Cook's Continental Timetable of 1933 this first part of the journey was due to take twenty-six days, meaning that Sarah would have arrived in India on or around 18 January.<sup>178</sup> British India was at a crucial point in its political history.<sup>179</sup> Civil unrest and disobedience influenced by Mohandas K. Gandhi, was going some way to help the ambitions

<sup>173</sup> Speake, *Literature of Travel* p.xiv.

<sup>174</sup> Letter One, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi.

<sup>175</sup> For information on the history of the Suez Canal and the movement of people thereof see, Charles Arnold-Baker, *The Companion to British History* (London: Routledge 2008) pp.1184-1185; Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2013).

<sup>176</sup> Huber, *Channelling Mobilities* p.1.

<sup>177</sup> For a comprehensive history of Port Sudan see, Kenneth J. Perkins, *Port Sudan: The Evolution of a Colonial City* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press 1993). For continuance of route see, Thomas Cook Organisation, 'Shipping Section,' *Cook's Continental Time Table* Dec 1933, Thomas Cook Archives, Peterborough, UK.

<sup>178</sup> Cook, 'Shipping Section' 1933.

<sup>179</sup> Andrew Muldoon, "'The Cow is Still the Most Important Figure in Indian Politics!': Religion, Imperial Culture and the Shaping of Indian Political Reform in the 1930s,' *Parliamentary History* 27:1 (2008) pp.67-81; Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994) pp.264-292.

of the more politically minded native population to achieve a degree of autonomy.<sup>180</sup> There were two main events that, according to Judith Brown, were to shape the 1935 Government of India Act; namely, a set of 'three Round Table conferences in London between 1930 and 1932', and a 'second continental satyagraha under Gandhi's guidance' from 1930 to 1934, the year of Sarah's arrival.<sup>181</sup> Also in 1934, Jawaharlal Nehru, a contemporary of Sarah's first husband at Harrow School, the man destined to become the first Indian Prime Minister, was serving one of his many prison sentences for seditious behaviour against the British authorities, whilst seeking independence for his country.<sup>182</sup>

On arrival in Bombay, Sarah went straight to the Japanese Consulate and was seemingly unaware, or perhaps uninterested in the political problems facing the British in India:

'Mr. Kurihara, the consul in Bombay, was very nice to me and took me to see the Towers of Silence and out to dinner and to a dance'.<sup>183</sup>

From Bombay Sarah travelled inland. It is most likely she used the Indian Railways, the only really practical way to cross the entire country. She visited Jaipur, which she greatly enjoyed, and again, in her letter, seems to view the local issues with naïveté:

'It is so very Indian - quite unspoilt and most interesting. Jackals howled under my windows all night. A peacock walked into my bathroom and almost fell into my bath. Hundreds of monkeys run on the housetops and the birds and butterflies are wonderful because no one is allowed to kill anything in that district - not even dangerous animals and the tigers seem to get about one man a week - but nobody cares.'<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Andrew Muldoon, *Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act: Last Act of the Raj* (London and New York: Routledge 2016) pp.7-38; Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1972) pp.16-52.

<sup>181</sup> Brown, *Modern India* p.261.

<sup>182</sup> Sankar Ghose, 'Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography,' Ministry of Culture, Government of India Nehru Portal: Seventh Imprisonment 12 February 1934-3 September 1935 [online] <http://nehruportal.nic.in/> (accessed 19 September 2016).

<sup>183</sup> Letter One, Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi.

<sup>184</sup> Letter One, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi.

Then on to Delhi, where Sarah would have experienced first-hand the last throes of the British Raj. Delhi held the centre of power, with the new Government buildings, designed by Edwin Lutyens just a few years before in the area known as New Delhi, a testament to the British reluctance to relinquish hold of the Imperial jewel.<sup>185</sup>

From the crowded hustle and bustle of Delhi, she headed southwards to Agra and the Taj Mahal, which she described as 'too lovely for description' and visited four times in one day. Then she continued on to Benares, the ancient centre for fabric production and ivory carving on the banks of the Ganges, before arriving in Calcutta.<sup>186</sup> Sarah described this part of her trip as 'all very interesting and very expensive!'<sup>187</sup> It is not known how the trip was financed, although it was likely to be Robert who was providing the money. Perhaps she was on an enforced budget and therefore conscious of the rising costs associated with the journey.

On Friday 9 February 1934, she planned to leave India to head for Rangoon the former capital of Burma:

'from there I go up the river to Irrawaddy and then to Bhamo. After that I shall go straight to Singapore and try to find a small cargo ship which will call at plenty of places on the way to China.'<sup>188</sup>

This appears to be where Sarah's attitude to the trip became more adventurous and she ceased to behave as a pampered British tourist, as this tantalisingly brief note in the second letter of the series records:

'One lesson I have certainly learned since I left home, ... is that I am not so fragile as I thought, and that it is amazing what dangers one can come through unharmed. That I ever returned from the interior of China and got by Tibet is a miracle in itself.'<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (London and New York: Routledge 2008) pp.63-121.

<sup>186</sup> Rana P. B. Singh, *Banaras: Making of India's Heritage City* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009) pp.45 and 57; Diana L. Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (New York: Columbia University Press 1999) pp.310-311.

<sup>187</sup> Letter One, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi.

<sup>188</sup> Letter One, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi.

<sup>189</sup> Letter Two, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi, 27 June 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

By 1934 fighting had been taking place between, essentially, the nationalists and communists in China for nearly seven years as part of the 'First Revolutionary Civil War'.<sup>190</sup> Why Sarah considered travelling to parts of China when she must have known of the problems and dangers there, is unknown. Although most of her travel plans had been taken care of by the Thomas Cook company, this section of the journey seems to have been arranged by Sarah herself, which would demonstrate her adventurous spirit, or possibly her naïveté.

The nature of the journey from the arranged and organised trip at the start, to the unplanned hopping aboard of small cargo boats around dangerous territories, seems almost to represent Sarah's change from an indulged and indulgent woman of British Society to a daring and risk-taking individual. Her childhood and young adulthood had prepared her for such an independent foray, and although she was not travelling as an explorer, she perhaps would have considered herself an adventurer.

### 3.6 Chapter Three: Conclusions

This chapter has seen Sarah move full circle, from an independent businesswoman, to the financially supported wife of a wealthy man engaging with high society, and returning, not perhaps to an independence of means, but certainly of spirit.

Her life in the country with Robert brought a higher social standing, particularly at Quarr, a country house estate, suitable for welcoming guests from the higher echelons of society. However, the uncertainty and fragility of Sarah's former occupation perhaps resonated through her marriage. and she looked outside the relationship for personal stimulation and fulfilment. Breeding dogs and using her talents as a drama producer with the W.I. would seem not to have been enough distraction, and she also chose the Budokwai, judo, and Japanese culture as an outlet for her energy and curiosity. This led to her voyage to the Far East, where she rediscovered an independence of mind and an

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<sup>190</sup> Xiaobing Li (ed), *China at War: An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: ABC Clio 2012) p.1; Sun Shuyun, *The Long March: The True History of Communist China's Founding Myth* (New York: Anchor Books 2008) prologue.

adventurous spirit, which prepared her to set foot on the hard road to judo success.

This chapter has also given an introduction to and begun the investigation into the juxtaposition between tradition and modernity within Sarah's life, which is a key aspect of the next chapter focusing on her experiences in Japan.

## 4. Rei - Hajime

‘It is quite impossible to adequately conceal oneself in a bucket’

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to answer one of the main research questions of this thesis, considering why she was treated in such an unusual way by the Japanese judo establishment and permitted access to spaces previously reserved for elite male training sessions. The thesis has developed through the writing of this chapter, and the discovery of the use of her image for Japanese political propaganda has brought another dimension to this question.

Jigorō Kanō, (1860-1938) the founder of judo as it is known today, an educator and instigator of many pedagogical reforms in Japan, and the first Japanese member of the International Olympic Committee, showed an interest in Sarah’s development within the ‘way’. Kanō has been much studied and has been argued to have developed judo as part of the modernisation of Japanese society.<sup>1</sup> Inoue’s work shows that Kanō’s ideals in *būdō* embraced internationalism.<sup>2</sup> This may provide one insight into why he was interested in Sarah. However, as his own writings show, Kanō also promoted patriotism, and this provides a wider context for his mentorship of a Western woman.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter investigates the international ambitions held by Kanō for the spread of judo, and the promotion of Japan within a global community. In relation to Sarah, we can see her value as a highly visible tool for supporting international relations. Likewise, the interest shown by government officials, in using Sarah within the sphere of international propaganda and the tourism industry, is argued to be related to the contemporary war in China, and rift within The League of Nations.

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<sup>1</sup> For example see, Yoshinobu Hamaguchi, ‘Innovation in Martial Arts,’ in Joseph Maguire and Masayoshi Nakayama (eds), *Japan, Sport and Society: Tradition and Change in a Globalizing World* (London and New York: Routledge 2006) pp.7-18; William W. Kelly (ed) with Atsuo Sugimoto, *This Sporting Life: Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan* (Newhaven, CT: Yale University Press 2007) pp.75-76.

<sup>2</sup> Shun Inoue, ‘The Invention of the Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and Kodokan Judo,’ in S. Vlastos (ed), *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press 1998) pp.163-173.

<sup>3</sup> Naoki Murata (ed) and Nancy H. Ross (trans), *Mind over Muscle: Writings from the Founder of Judo, Jigorō Kano* (Tokyo, New York and London: Kodansha International 2005) p.59.

Using extracts from the last six of Sarah Mayer's letters, sent whilst in Japan to her sensei at the Budokwai in London, this chapter explores the significance of the trip itself in her *shinnichi* consciousness. Part of the impact of Sarah's time in Japan, is clearly shown through the connections she made. To 2019, there have only ever been fifteen Kōdōkan *jūdan*, or tenth dan recipients, and in 1934, as well as spending time with Kanō, Sarah met and interacted with six of these men, being trained by five of them.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, her experiences were arguably at a pivotal moment in the history of judo, and by extension, Anglo-Japanese relations. The chapter is divided into seven sections following the chronology of the letters, to determine Sarah's actions and place her at a complex juncture between Japan and The West.

Sarah's letters provide unique insights into the lives of individuals negotiating this complex era between Britain and Japan, as well as the gendered and changing cultural praxis in judo. These highly personal sources were of course intended to be read and therefore constitute a kind of epistolary diary of fact and opinion, to be compared alongside other primary sources, from Japanese archival material to international newspapers.

Questions raised by this material not only include the possible reasons and motivations for the behaviour of the judo establishment, which is implicit in the wider establishment of the country, but also of the Japanese and international press, related to Sarah's unprecedented treatment within an inherently male environment. Additionally, what were Sarah's stated motivations and opinions in going to Japan? How might these be contextualised and interrogated by the wider literature in the public domain?

Taking each letter in turn, the chapter's chronological composition is developed by a close reading and analysis of the evidence, triangulated with these contextual sources.<sup>5</sup> This includes both Sarah's personal life events, and the wider contextual circumstance, in order to tie into outside events, whether they be political or geographical, which would have affected, or been affected by,

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<sup>4</sup> Kōdōkan Judo Institute, 'Kodokan Hall of Fame,' [online] <http://kodokanjudoinstitutione.org/en/doctrine/palace/> (accessed July 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Writing Biography: Historians and their Craft* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2004) p.xi; Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison *Research Methods in Education, Seventh Edition* (London and New York: Routledge 2011) p.166.

Sarah's place or part within. So, this text interrogates the autobiographical details outlined by Sarah's letters, challenging her interpretation and at times confirming her version of events.

But first, to understand the context of Sarah's trip, it is useful to look at the historical state of affairs between Britain and Japan, leading up to Sarah's visit. In 1933, although previously allied nations, Britain and Japan were encountering difficulties with their political relationship.

With the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902, as Davis states, 'Britain and Japan shared a strategic interest in the containment of Russian ambitions in the Far East'.<sup>6</sup> Just two years later, the Russo-Japanese war saw the alliance invoked as Britain helped to discourage France from joining Russian defences.<sup>7</sup> With the Japanese victory the alliance was renewed. This accord continued into and beyond the First World War, when four permanent member countries, Britain, France, Italy and Japan, formed The League of Nations. Burkman describes The League of Nations project as 'usher[ing] those it affected into world citizenship and inspir[ing] them to build bridges across boundaries and cultures'.<sup>8</sup> World citizenship was something Japan was keen to foster, believing that she too, should be entitled to build her Empire, although others were crumbling.

In 1931, three years before Sarah's arrival in Japan, came the Manchurian or Mukden Incident. Sandra Wilson describes how the Japanese Kwantung Army staged an explosion on part of a railway owned and run by Japan in Manchuria, blaming the Chinese, and staging a full-scale invasion of the area, although she argues that the Japanese government was not wholly behind the move.<sup>9</sup> However, the crisis led to a strained relationship between Japan and the other nations, including Britain, who held concessions within China, and culminated in

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<sup>6</sup> Christina L. Davis, 'Linkage Diplomacy: Economic and Security Bargaining in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-23,' *International Security* 33:3 (2008) pp.143-179; also see Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Longmans 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Nish *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1884-1907* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2012) pp.286-289.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii 2008) p.xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-1933* (London and New York: Routledge 2003) pp.77-104.



Japan leaving The League of Nations. Japan eventually occupied the area, effectively creating a puppet state.

So, this was the political situation between the two countries as Sarah's boat moored up on the south coast of Japan.

## 4.2 Letter Two, February 1934-June 1934

### **Letter Two, Yamato Hotel, Kōbe. 27 June 1934**

'I have even recovered from the shock of finding that I was expected to share the bathroom - not to mention the bath - with the entire Kobe police force,'

As the first correspondence from Sarah to Koizumi was sent from India, this chapter begins with her arrival at Kōbe in the spring of 1934, when Sarah checked into the Yamato Hotel.<sup>10</sup> Her choice of hotel indicates that at the start of her time in Japan, she was acting as a western tourist, staying in a hotel designed to appeal to the foreign market. Advertisements in *The Japan Times* in 1934, held at The British Library, show that this hotel was situated in the area known as Nakayamata, just south of the mountains.<sup>11</sup> It was frequently the only, or one of very few hotels to have a boxed advertisement in the newspaper. The only other hotel which was advertised separately, for example, in the 2 March 1935 issue, is the Koshien, described as being 'Midway between Osaka and Kobe on the Hanshin Highway'.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that hotels advertising in English language newspapers would be seeking to attract a western clientele. This is further supported by the advertisements for the Yamato Hotel which show that a European-style room for one person in 1934 cost from ¥2.50 a night, ¥4.00 if it included a bath.<sup>13</sup> This helps us to understand that Sarah considered herself as a foreign tourist at the beginning of her trip, and was not originally assimilating into the Japanese culture or way of life.

Japan had opened to the rest of the world officially in the 1860s following the *sakoku* or closed country, which restricted trade with foreign countries and

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<sup>10</sup> Address given on Letter Two from Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi 27 June 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>11</sup> 'Yamato Hotel' *The Japan Times* 2 March 1934 p.2.

<sup>12</sup> 'Koshien Hotel' *The Japan Times* 2 March 1934 p.2.

<sup>13</sup> 'Yamato Hotel' *The Japan Times* 2 March 1934 p.2.

travel, and had been in place since the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> This caused, not only an influx of visitors to Japan, but an interest in all things Japanese across the west. As Alexandre Dumas noted in his play *Francillon* in the 1870s, 'Everything is Japanese now'.<sup>15</sup> Nakagawa explains that the Japanese tourism industry had begun in earnest with a voluntary organisation called the *Kihin-Kai* or Welcome Society of Japan, in 1893, with the intention of improving the national image and identity in a growing global society as well as soliciting foreign currency.<sup>16</sup> It called for hotels with facilities 'fit' for foreign visitors. Following the nationalisation of the railways in 1906, funding for the *Kihin-Kai* was seriously depleted, causing the implementation of The Japan Tourist Bureau in 1912, a 'semi-governmental organisation ... [operating] under the direction of the Japanese Government Railways'.<sup>17</sup> The industry developed over the following eighteen years, and in 1930 the Board of Tourist Industry was set up as a full governmental department, again within the Railway Ministry.<sup>18</sup> March shows that the main aim was to promote Japan to foreign tourists, which Funck states was in order to attract money from overseas, therefore helping to address the economic period of recession.<sup>19</sup> Kōbe had become a relatively cosmopolitan place, home to an historic port, opened to foreign trade at the end of the *bakumatsu* (or closing of the Edo period, just prior to the Meiji Restoration in 1868), with ships bringing cargo from around the world.<sup>20</sup> By 1935, *The Japan Times* claimed that tourists were on the increase 'according to the Board of

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<sup>14</sup> Tashiro Kazui 'Foreign Relations During the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined,' *Journal of Japanese Studies* 8/2 (Summer 1982) pp.22-25; Roten Kowner 'Japan and the Rise of the Idea of Race: The Meiji Era Fusion of Foreign and Domestic Constructions,' in Yoneyuki Sugita (ed) *Social Commentary on State and Society in Modern Japan* (Singapore: Springer 2016) p.36.

<sup>15</sup> Alexandre Dumas, 'Francillon,' in Deshler Welch (ed), *The Theatre: An Illustrated Weekly Magazine*, Vol 3 (New York: Theatre Publishing Company 1888) p.16.

<sup>16</sup> Koichi Nakagawa 'Prewar Tourism Promotion by Japanese Government Railways,' *Japan Railway & Transport Review* 15 (1998) pp.22-27.

<sup>17</sup> Nakagawa 'Prewar Tourism' p.23.

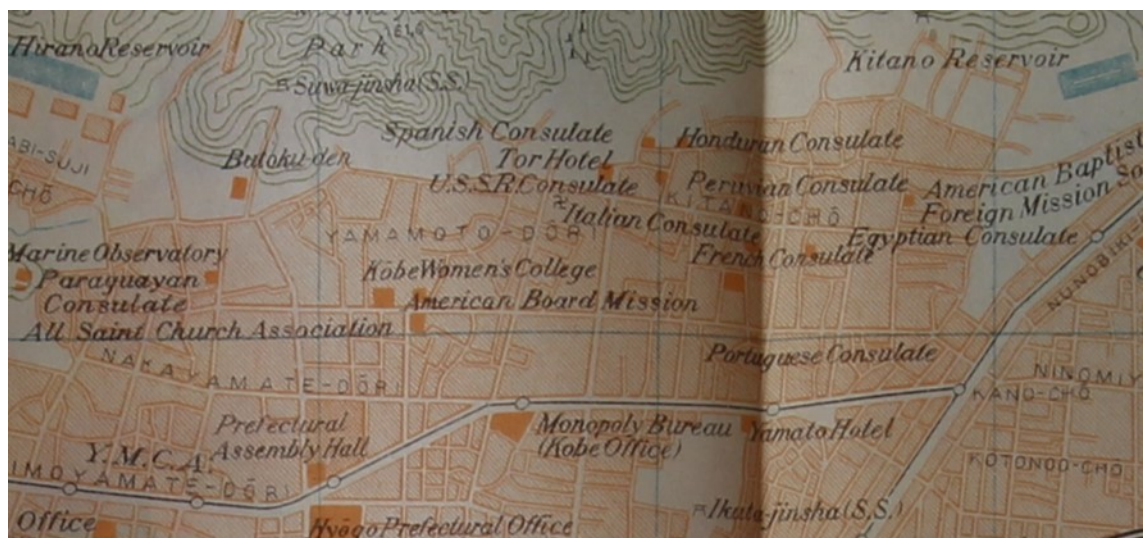
<sup>18</sup> Roger March 'How Japan Solicited the West: The First Hundred Years of Modern Japanese Tourism,' in Ian McDonnell, Simone Grabowski and Roger March (eds), *Tourism: Past Achievements, Future Challenges* (Sydney, NSW: University of Technology Sydney 2007) pp.843-852; Carolin Funck and Malcolm Cooper, *Japanese Tourism: Spaces, Places and Structures* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn 2013) pp.35-36.

<sup>19</sup> March 'How Japan Solicited the West,' pp.849-850; Funck and Cooper, *Japanese Tourism* p.35.

<sup>20</sup> Grace Fox, *Britain and Japan 1858-1883* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969) p.360; Hugh Cortazzi, *Victorians in Japan: In and around the Treaty Ports* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2012) p.157.

Tourist Industry of the Department of Railways', saying that during 1934, 35,198 tourists had visited Japan.<sup>21</sup> One of this number was Sarah.

Sarah's arrival at the hotel came two years after the start of the somewhat successful Takahashi Economic Policy, aimed at recovery from the Shōwa Depression.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the Japanese financial crises of the 1920s, which were based in the local economy and were to a large degree related to the Great Kantō earthquake and subsequent debts, Akiyoshi argues that the Shōwa Depression of 1930-1932 was linked to global depression, and the return to the gold standard.<sup>23</sup> Sarah did not show any awareness of these economic conditions, and her first letter sent from the Yamato Hotel was dated 27 June 1934. A later article was to give her arrival date as May, and soon after alighting from the final vessel in her journey to this alien environment, Sarah arranged to visit the Butokuden, or Hall of Martial Virtues, (a venue for the Butokukai or Martial Virtues Association system) with the hope of studying judo there.<sup>24</sup>



17. Map of Kōbe, 1933, showing location of Butokuden and Yamato Hotel, from *An Official Guide to Japan* (Tokyo: Japanese Government Railways 1933).

<sup>21</sup> 'Tourists on Increase' *The Japan Times* 1 March 1935 p.8.

<sup>22</sup> Masato Shizume 'The Japanese Economy during the Interwar Period: Instability in the Financial System and the Impact of the World Depression,' *Institute for Monetary and Economic Studies, Bank of Japan Review* May (2009) [online] [https://www.boj.or.jp/en/research/wps\\_rev/rev\\_2009/data/rev09e02.pdf](https://www.boj.or.jp/en/research/wps_rev/rev_2009/data/rev09e02.pdf) (accessed January 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Fumio Akiyoshi, 'Banking Panics, Bank Failures, and the Lender of Last Resort: The Showa Depression of 1930–1932,' *Oxford Economic Papers* 61:4 (2009) pp.776-800 doi:10.1093/oep/gpp016; Shizume 'The Japanese Economy' p.1.

<sup>24</sup> Japanese press cuttings attached to Sarah Mayer letters and referred to in such, no name of newspaper or date shown, C.64, Bowen Collection, University of Bath; Letter Two, Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi.

The Butokukai was part of the ongoing national emphasis on martial values first established with the Samurai in feudal times, but increasingly nationalistic and imperialist following the Meiji Restoration.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, this is significant when we are considering the treatment of Mayer by the Japanese establishment, and the reasons for her achievement. Following the *Haito Rei* in the 1870s, where carrying the sword was forbidden in order to discontinue the Samurai hegemonic society after the Meiji Restoration, the newly formed Ministry of Education considered the use of traditional martial fighting techniques as part of physical education within the school system.<sup>26</sup>

The Dai Nippon (All Japan) Butokukai, founded in 1895, sought to contain and continue these ancient traditions and attributes with an emphasis on education and martial training.<sup>27</sup> Gainty asserts that this was the focus of a new 'Modern' Japan designed to help Japanese integration into the international community, although its context of nationalism and the fostering of a Japanese patriotic population capable of competing on the international stage, with a militaristic concept, through the education system, is considered by Hurst to have been paramount.<sup>28</sup> Clearly this was a reason for the dissolution of the Butokukai by the allied forces following the end of the Second World War. However, this would appear to be counterintuitive, as the *būdō* techniques eventually chosen for use in schools by the education committee through consultation with the Butokukai were *kendō* and judo.<sup>29</sup> Neither of these 'ways' were developed to compete with new technologies for warfare, but to preserve the 'ancient' Samurai or *bushido* ethical and philosophical moralities, although there is no

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<sup>25</sup> Ikuo Abe, Yasuharu Kiyohara, and Ken Nakajima, 'Fascism, Sport and Society in Japan,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9:1 (1992) pp.1-28.

<sup>26</sup> John M. Rogers, 'Divine Destruction: The Shinpūren Rebellion of 1876,' in Helen Hardacre and Adam L. Kern (eds), *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan* (Leiden, New York and Cologne: Brill 1997) p.417; G. Cameron Hurst III *Armed Martial Arts of Japan* (London: Yale University Press 1998) p.162.

<sup>27</sup> Denis Gainty, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Meiji Japan* (London and New York: Routledge 2013) p.1; Abe, 'Fascism, Sport and Society in Japan' pp.1-28.

<sup>28</sup> Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan* p.162.

<sup>29</sup> Alex Bennett (ed and trans), *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan: An Innovative Response to Modernisation* (Tokyo: Kōdōkan Judo Institute 2009) p.169; Alexander C. Bennett, *Kendo: Culture of the Sword* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2015) p.134; Frank Nieves, *The Modern Samurai: Martial Studies and the Modernization of the Japanese School System* (Miami: Institute of Budo Studies 2016) p.85.

doubt that there is a strong concentration towards loyalty and national pride within the traditional values of these two sports.<sup>30</sup> In 1921, Kanō wrote:

‘if we want the future people of Japan to value their country, and if we want to strengthen the people’s love of their country, we must impart the spirit of the martial arts to the young people of today, even if only a little.’<sup>31</sup>

Following the establishment of the Butokukai in Kyoto in 1895, the first Butokuden was built near the Heian Shrine in the city, and gradually more opened across the country.<sup>32</sup>

Sarah’s introduction to the Butokukai in Kōbe was not the low-key visit as a spectator that she had perhaps imagined. The sensei at the Society was Yamamoto Masanobu. He was the coach for the Hyōgo Prefecture police force and a champion *jūdōka*, who also taught at the Kōbe University judo club.<sup>33</sup> To become the sensei at the Butokukai was a great honour, and in the early twentieth-century, many men put in positions of authority at judo institutions across Japan, were placed there by Kanō.<sup>34</sup>

Sarah’s first visit caused much anticipation for both Yamamoto, and the Kōbe police force, who practised judo there. Sarah explained:

‘I was with difficulty persuaded to put on my judo costume and when I did I found to my horror that hundreds of men had left their practice of judo and kendo and were sitting in solemn rows waiting to see what I was going to do.’<sup>35</sup>

This must have been quite a spectacle for an Englishwoman, who had recently arrived in Japan. Lines of Japanese men in creamy white *jūdōgi*, and striking black voluminous *kendōgi*, plus, and crucially, a row of press photographers, all curious to see how she would perform this most Japanese of activities.

How the press had learnt of Sarah’s intention to visit the Butokuden, or whether it was a coincidence that they were there, remains unclear. She was such an

<sup>30</sup> Murata, *Mind Over Muscle* pp.63 and 111; Bennett, *Kendo* p.134.

<sup>31</sup> Murata, *Mind Over Muscle* p.111.

<sup>32</sup> Gainty, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic* p.4. Bennett, *Kendo* p.117.

<sup>33</sup> Kōbe University ‘History of the Judo Club,’ [online] [www.kobe-judo.com/2009-04-12-07-21-55](http://www.kobe-judo.com/2009-04-12-07-21-55) (accessed January 2017) [in Japanese].

<sup>34</sup> Murata, *Mind over Muscle* p.25; Syd Hoare, *A History of Judo* (London: Yamagi Books 2009) p.96.

<sup>35</sup> Letter Two.

unusual sight, from, ostensibly, a privileged British background, perhaps her otherness alone made her worthy of attention.<sup>36</sup>

Sarah projected a very different image to that of the typical Japanese female. An obvious difference was her height, being comparatively tall. Her page in *The Spotlight Casting Directory* of 1939 shows her listed as five feet five inches.<sup>37</sup> The nature of a casting directory means that this information might not be entirely accurate, but it is unlikely to be far from the truth. Also, a Japanese newspaper clipping found with Sarah's letters at The Bowen Collection, stated that Sarah was five shaku, five sun.<sup>38</sup> This is a Japanese imperial measurement, and roughly, although not exactly, equates to feet and inches.<sup>39</sup> The Statistics Bureau of Japan indicates that the average height of a Japanese female at the age of seventeen in the year Shōwa 9 (1934) was 151.2cm or just under five feet, whereas the average height for a man in the same year was 162.1cm or just under five feet four inches, making Sarah the same height or slightly taller than the average man and considerably taller than Japanese women.<sup>40</sup>

Yamamoto was the first man in Japan to test this western woman's judo prowess, but according to Sarah, during their first bout in front of the rows of fighters and photographers, neither he nor she initially appeared to relish the prospect: 'Mr. Yamamoto looked quite unhappy too. He handled me as if I was a bomb that might explode at any minute'.<sup>41</sup> This could imply that he was not used to training with a woman. They had, what was seemingly a gentle practice session, under the gaze of the expectant men, where Yamamoto allowed her to throw him a few times, and tested her reactions while softly attacking. Sarah, however, was determined not to embarrass herself: 'I attacked him with might

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<sup>36</sup> The Spotlight Casting Directory, Leading Ladies, Sarah B. Tapping (1939) p.488 Westminster Reference Library, London.

<sup>37</sup> Spotlight, Sarah B Tapping (1939) p.488.

<sup>38</sup> Japanese press cuttings attached to Sarah Mayer's letters and referred to in such, no name of newspaper or date shown, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>39</sup> James Curtis Hepburn, *A Japanese and English Dictionary: With English and Japanese Index* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press 1867) p.395.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau Japan, School Health Statistics Survey [online] <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/List.do?bid=000001014499&> (accessed July 2018) [in Japanese].

<sup>41</sup> Letter Two.

and main feeling that death itself would be better than disgracing myself forever before such an assembly'.<sup>42</sup>

This first press interest in Sarah may have been significant in the continuation of her reception in Japan. She described how they were keen to take photographs, however, there was a short hiatus while 'a man of august personage', who wore a *kimono* and fanned himself throughout the proceedings, with a 'distinct lack of enthusiasm', halted the photographers, and much to Sarah's consternation, approached her.<sup>43</sup> However, all he did was to untie her belt, fold her judo jacket across to the other side, probably to conform to the female way to wear a kimono, and then signal to the photographers to continue. This was the first indication of the judo establishment being keen to publicise Sarah's visit in a positive way.

It is unknown which newspaper's staff were present. Sarah had enclosed some newspaper clippings with her first letter from Japan, although these do not appear to have survived within the collection. The British Library holds a subscription to the *Kikuzo II Visual* collection, which features archives of national newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, and searches show that the first report about Sarah to be found in that particular publication was from 10 January 1935. The *Japan Times* first mentions her on 10 March 1935, so it was neither of these national newspapers which held reports on her early involvement with judo in Japan.

Sarah's letter began by explaining why she was still in Kōbe: 'This is really because everyone is so kind to me at the Butokuden and Mr. Yamamoto is so patient with me that I do not feel inclined to leave here just yet.'<sup>44</sup> The Butokuden was situated in a quiet area north of the city at the base of the mountains not far from Sarah's hotel. The police station, from where many of the *jūdōka* came to train, and with whom, it would seem, Sarah was to become intimately acquainted during the post training session bathing rituals, was a few blocks south.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>43</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>44</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>45</sup> 1930s tourist map of Kōbe, author's own collection.

Sarah was already showing how she was becoming dedicated to learning more about the art of judo. By June, she was training daily, starting at 8 am with a private lesson with Yamamoto. Other *jūdōka* would gather around to point out errors missed by the sensei. The judo she was being taught in Japan seems to have been somewhat tougher than she was used to in England, and she asked Koizumi to 'Tell Mr. Tani that I am having a lovely time but that no one here treats me as gently as he did. I now realize how tenderly he used to drop me upon the mat!'<sup>46</sup> She also expressed her initial shock at being expected to share the bathroom, 'not to mention the bath, with the entire Kōbe police force'.<sup>47</sup> This surprising fact shows an interesting aspect of Japanese culture in this period, as it was highly unusual for a woman to be practising judo with men, other than their teachers. However, despite being technically banned during the Tokugawa period and beyond, as both Hadfield and Tobin show, mixed bathing was completely accepted by ordinary people.<sup>48</sup> This becomes particularly relevant and important to the thesis in relation to Sarah's pro-Japanese article written five years after her arrival in Japan in 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War and is addressed at that point within the narrative.<sup>49</sup>

Sarah was being treated in an exceptional manner as a female judoka. In June 1934, just a few months into her visit, she was invited to attend a day of competitions, where there was more evidence of her anomalous treatment.<sup>50</sup> A comparative beginner in Japanese judo terms, and almost certainly not the only spectator, she was placed at the judges' table, where she spent the entire day watching the contests, only breaking for lunch, which was also taken with the judges. This infers that great honour was placed on Sarah, seemingly based on her race and supposed social status in Britain, along with Yamamoto's willingness to accept and welcome her as a *jūdōka*.

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<sup>46</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>47</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>48</sup> James Hadfield, 'Last splash: Immodest Japanese Tradition of Mixed Bathing May Be on the Verge of Extinction' in *The Japan Times* 10 December 2016 [online] <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2016/12/10/lifestyle/last-splash-immodest-japanese-tradition-mixed-bathing-may-verge-extinction/#.WyjzyqdKjIV> (accessed June 2018); Joseph J. Tobin, *Re-made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1992) p.92.

<sup>49</sup> See Section 5.4.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah described the contests as taking place 'the other day', see Letter Two.



This treatment does, however, conform to the tourism ideals being encouraged by the government at that time, despite inherent worries about foreign espionage. It can be seen from her letters that Sarah was treated extremely well by her Japanese hosts: 'everyone is so kind to me, and [they] send me flowers and presents and take me all over the place'.<sup>51</sup> March argues that although the tourist industry in Japan was buoyant during the 1930s, there was some conflict between the 'Ministry of Commerce and Industry charged with improving the quality of tourist operations' along with 'the government-funded Bureau of Tourist Industry', and the Foreign Office, who were becoming 'increasingly paranoid about foreign spies' and who would detain and question suspects.<sup>52</sup> Sarah does not appear to have fallen foul of the Foreign Office though, and she was continually treated with kindness.

Likewise, Sarah was attempting to embrace Japanese culture. She mentioned a Japanese journalist, referred to in a subsequent letter as Mr. Ichiya, who had been helping her with interpretation. He also helped with 'the difficult question of proper behaviour so that I don't do the wrong thing too often'. This seems to have been important to Sarah and is a recurring theme in her letters. She was also having daily lessons in Japanese language, although she seems to have had none before her trip, and confessed to find it 'so awkward ... not to be able to understand a word that is said to me'.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps her motivation to learn the language was to ease potential embarrassment, rather than to integrate into the Japanese way of life.

The news of Sarah's visit was spreading, and she was contacted by a Mr. Yamabe, who encouraged her to visit Kyoto, saying he would take care of all her arrangements if she travelled there.<sup>54</sup> Yamabe seems to be someone who was known to Koizumi, and perhaps his letter followed an introduction to Sarah from Koizumi. Hatta Ichiro, a young man from Tokyo, also wrote to her, 'urging me to go straight to Tokyo and let him teach me judo there'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>52</sup> March, 'How Japan Solicited the West,' pp.848-849; 'Japan to Modify Trials of Visitors' *The New York Times* 16 December 1934 p.2.

<sup>53</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>54</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>55</sup> Letter Two.

Hatta Ichiro was born in Hiroshima in around 1906 making him ten years younger than Sarah.<sup>56</sup> There is evidence that he had travelled to England in 1931 where it is possible that they had met at the Budokwai.<sup>57</sup> He had a good network of judo connections in Tokyo, being close to both Mifune Kyūzō and Jigorō Kanō himself. In a letter to Koizumi, Sarah referred to him simply as Hatta, implying that they both knew him. Hatta also sent Sarah an introduction to Kyoto, but she seemed more concerned with Yamamoto's introduction for when she travelled there. Somewhat naïvely, she said that if the judo she found in Kyoto and Tokyo was not as good as in Kōbe, she would return there.

Sarah was clearly enjoying her time in Kōbe and this was either outweighing her judo ambition, or she was unaware of the importance of the other two cities with regard to judo. However, life in this new culture was not all easy:

'I am feeling very fit in spite of having burnt my hand, cutting my foot on broken glass, having an electric fan fall on my head the other day and a few minor accidents of that kind. To say nothing of landing upon my head this morning several times running, when Mr. Yamamoto did the stomach throw.'<sup>58</sup>

Yamamoto's attention and support, notwithstanding the continual practice of throwing her on her head, undoubtedly impacted upon Sarah's commitment to her arduous training regime, at the expense of time spent as a tourist.

There was a clear interest in Sarah as a visiting *jūdōka* by the press, many focusing on her blonde hair.<sup>59</sup> Her image as a modern western woman indicates a link to the Japanese *Modan Gāru* or *Moga* phenomenon, with its commercial and popularist appeal. Miriam Silverberg argues that 'the representation of the Modern Girl' should be defined 'as the Japanese cultural heroine of the

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<sup>56</sup> Bearbeitet von Berend Wispelwey (compiler) *Japanese Biographical Index* (Munich: K G Saur 2004) p.173; *Tatsuta Maru*, Yokohama, Departure 21 December 1933, Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States, Microfilm Publication A3422, Roll 138, RG 85, The National Archives, Washington, D.C. [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed June 2018).

<sup>57</sup> *Kashima Maru*, London, Departure 28 August 1931, UK Outward Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed June 2018).

<sup>58</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>59</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*' Unnamed and Undated Newspaper Clipping held with Letters from Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi February 1934-January 1935 [in Japanese] C.64, R.B.C.

1920s'.<sup>60</sup> Sarah portrayed the very essence of modernity. She mentioned that after burning her hand on a box of matches, she had become nervous of lighting her cigarettes and that, 'together with the exhortations of my judo instructor - I should not be surprised if I were not finally induced to give up smoking altogether!'<sup>61</sup> Rosemary Eliot asserts that smoking in Britain was

'Seen as a symbol of women's emancipation in the 1890s by both its adherents and its detractors, cigarette smoking became associated with sophisticated femininity in the 1920s and 1930s.'<sup>62</sup>

Tinkler shows that 'modernity' was crucial to cigarette smoking commerciality for women, a key concept for this thesis.<sup>63</sup> As Sato illustrates, the 'media's portrayal of the modern girl' was 'one of the most visible products of the consumer dream' in the inter-war period, and the highly commercial style was being used to promote everything from face powder to light bulbs.<sup>64</sup> Sato also notes that 'What made the modern girl such a powerful symbol was not that she represented a small percentage of "real women," but that she represented the possibilities for what all women could become.'<sup>65</sup> In Britain, *The Evening Standard* characterized the modern girl as less reverent than once she was: 'She is too busy keeping fit: educating herself: playing games: running a business: running a home: flying an aeroplane, or looking after a baby.'<sup>66</sup>

Although the Modern Girl could be categorized as a global phenomenon,<sup>67</sup> with the use of westernised imagery, the Modan Garu in Japan was demonstrating her modernity whilst challenging the male hegemonic societal construct. This imagery was also used in a sporting context, and magazines aimed at girls not only used Japanese stars, such as Hitomi Kinue, but featured western

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<sup>60</sup> Miriam Silverberg, 'The Modern Girl as Militant,' in Gail Lee Bernstein (ed), *Recreating Japanese Women 1600-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991) pp.239-266.

<sup>61</sup> Letter Two.

<sup>62</sup> Rosemary Eliot, '"Destructive but Sweet": Cigarette Smoking among Women 1890-1990,' (Thesis for Ph.D., University of Glasgow, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Penny Tinkler, '"Red Tips for Hot Lips": Advertising Cigarettes for Young Women in Britain, 1920-70,' *Women's History Review*, 10/2, 2001 pp.249-272, doi:10.1080/09612020100200289.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University, Press 2003) p.9.

<sup>65</sup> Sato, *New Japanese Woman* p.49.

<sup>66</sup> Clemence Dane, 'Modern Beauty has Nothing to Fear' *Evening Standard* 27 March 1930, in Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage* (London and New York: Routledge 1996) p.3.

<sup>67</sup> Alys Eve Weinbaum et al (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization* (London: Duke University Press 2008).

sportswomen such as Suzanne Lenglen.<sup>68</sup> As a western female, choosing to practise this most Japanese of sports, the commercialisation of Sarah's own Modern Girl image would later prove to be ideal for publicity, both promoting judo for women, and for use by the government within an international political context (see 4.4 to 4.8).

The combination of the cosmopolitan nature of Kōbe, and the recognition of Sarah as *bona fide* by Yamamoto, a senior figure in the area, contributed to an auspicious start to her trip, and her acceptance in the male world of judo, and she was initially reluctant to leave the city.<sup>69</sup>

### 4.3 Letter Three, June 1934-July 1934

#### **Letter Three, 385 Nakayamate Y-chome, Kōbe Ku, Kōbe. 23 July 1934**

'Don't you think I am very lucky, having all these expert judo men to teach me every day? I wish I were ten years younger!'

Within a month of her previous letter, Sarah had decided to stay in Kōbe and had 'taken a house'.<sup>70</sup> She furnished it for around ten pounds in the 'Japanese style' and had made friends with two Japanese young women. One of the women had lent Sarah a Japanese bed: a soft duvet type mattress which was rolled out in the evening onto the *tatami* matting. Sarah showed surprise at being able to sleep well in this manner, indicating that this was the first time she had used this style of bed, and showing how her actual experience of the Japanese culture was in its early stages.

Sarah's two new friends had very different characters. The first, Miss Adachi, was from Tokyo, and 'wears European clothes, behaves in European fashion and confesses to a preference for things European'.<sup>71</sup> She also taught Sarah Japanese, showing concern when she slipped into the Kōbe dialect, correcting her 'sternly'. Sarah, in return, taught Adachi English and philosophy.

<sup>68</sup> Koishihara Miho, 'A Study on Representations and Gender Norms of "Sporting Girls" in a Girls' Magazine of the 1920s and 1930s.' *スポーツとジェンダー研究 Sport and Gender Studies*. 12 2014: pp.4-18 [in Japanese].

<sup>69</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'.

<sup>70</sup> Letter Three, Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gunji 23 July 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>71</sup> Letter Three.

The other woman, who was not named in the letters, would not speak English to Sarah at all, and was more Japanese in her attitude, but she took care of instructions to the maid for Sarah, and made sure that the bills were paid correctly. She also taught Sarah 'proper manners' and *Ikebana*, the Japanese art of flower arranging. That Sarah should acquire the friendship of two women within a short time of her arrival, one modern and interested in the West, the other traditional and strongly defensive of her culture and language, shows in neat analogy the thematic concept of this thesis, the juxtaposition between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.

Sarah's intense dedication to improving her judo skills was beginning and she repeated in her third letter that she was training daily, including Sundays, beginning with a two-hour lesson from Yamamoto. She also travelled to a place called Miyahojigawa in the afternoons to learn swimming. A photograph, held at The Bowen Collection, shows Yamamoto in a swimming costume with another man, carrying a megaphone.



18. Photograph of Yamamoto Masanobu, 1934, reproduced by kind permission of The Richard Bowen Collection.

The reverse of the photograph is inscribed in Sarah's handwriting: 'Mr .Yamamoto who teaches me 'judo' and your [Koizumi's] friend Mr. Sonobe's

brother (with hat) who teaches me swimming.<sup>72</sup> Swimming was an important and integral part of Kanō's philosophy of judo practice and education in Japan and it is interesting that Sarah used it as part of her training regime so early in her trip.<sup>73</sup>

In July, Sarah's introduction to judo outside of Kōbe began when she went on a summer excursion to Kyoto while Yamamoto was away. She had taken with her the introductions from Hatta and Yamamoto to Isogai Hajime, the sensei at the Butokukai, a man who would shortly become one of the legendary Kōdōkan *jūdan*, or tenth *dan* recipients.

'He greeted me with that absence of enthusiasm that seems to be considered necessary to put would-be judoists in their proper place, and led me to a room where dozens of men were in a state of nature and invited me to change into my judo costume ... I am used to this by now!'<sup>74</sup>

She described how the class entered the *dōjō* in procession with Isogai at the front and herself at the rear. She was then paired with a fifth *dan*, who, like Yamamoto on their first meeting, gently tested her abilities. After watching carefully for a short time, the professor 'said something' to her opponent and his technique changed, throwing her enthusiastically around the mat.<sup>75</sup> Following a brief reprieve, the session was continued, but with Isogai's instruction and correction of her technique. Sarah noted that, 'He taught me quite a lot in a very short time.'

Sarah was then asked, through the interpretation of a local headmaster who had been called in for the task, whether she partook in the skills of *ne waza* or groundwork techniques, and her partner lay prone on the *tatami* matting. With her usual gusto and enthusiasm, Sarah attacked with every technique she could muster: 'The Professor and the others just sat down and laughed and laughed.'

Sarah's letter also reveals a facet of judo coaching for women in Britain in this period. She commented that, when undertaking groundwork training at home,

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<sup>72</sup> Currently Uncatalogued Photograph of Yamamoto and Sonobe [2018] R.B.C.

<sup>73</sup> Murata, *Mind over Muscle* p.55; Jigoro Kano Memorial International Sports Institute, 'Prof. Jigoro Kano and 100-Year Legacy,' [online] [http://www.100yearlegacy.org/english/Kano\\_Jigoro/](http://www.100yearlegacy.org/english/Kano_Jigoro/) (accessed March 2017).

<sup>74</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>75</sup> Letter Three.

both Koizumi and Tani were always the aggressors.<sup>76</sup> This implies that women were not being taught to be dominant, but reactive, in other words, to defend rather than attack. This is strong evidence of women's judo in Britain in the early twentieth century being taught as self-defence, and that techniques deemed suitable for women were not aggressive but defensive.

Why Isogai accepted Sarah into the class with men at this historic centre for *budō* education is not clear. His seeming lack of interest on her arrival altered through her visit, and he personally engaged with her, attempting to refine her techniques. This either shows that the judo she demonstrated was worthy of his attention, or that she showed sufficient seriousness in her ambition to improve.

Brousse states that by 1931, the Butokukai had become martial in the sense that it was used by the armed forces as part of the drive towards a military government.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, Bennett considers the 'escalation' of 'the nascent militaristic sentiment' of the Butokukai through the 1930s.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, despite being a predominantly educational organisation, the remit for the Butokukai was essentially military at its core. Women were not typically part of the militia, and the importance placed on traditional values could have prohibited women from inclusion. However, there was a precedent for females training through the Butokukai. Mizoguchi shows that Kosaki Katsuko (otherwise Osaki/Ozaki Kaneko) had become the first woman to gain a *dan* grade through the Butokukai in 1932.<sup>79</sup> Like Sarah, she chose to train amongst men, and considered the competitive 'fighting' aspect of judo to be important in her practice.<sup>80</sup> Isogai's acceptance of Sarah could have been due to the introductions from Hatta and Yamamoto, or he may have heard through the newspapers that she was training with men in Kōbe. But there seems to have been no other women at his training session. This continued acceptance of

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<sup>76</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>77</sup> Michel Brousse and Nicolas Messner, *Judo for the World* (Paris: International Judo Federation 2015) p.105.

<sup>78</sup> Bennett, *Kendo* p.132.

<sup>79</sup> Mizoguchi et al, 'The Fusion and Creation of Physical Culture and Media Globalization of Sports Culture,' *Bulletin of Shizuoka University of Arts and Culture*, 10, [in Japanese] pp.80-81. I have chosen to use the spelling and name used by Naitō in her biographical work through interview with Miss Kosaki, see, Naitō Yōko, *おんな三四郎 83歳宙をとぶ 女性黒帯第一号* [*The Female Sanshiro at 83 years Takes to the Air*] (Tokyo: エフエー出版 1996) [in Japanese].

<sup>80</sup> Naitō, *The Female Sanshiro* p.145; Mizoguchi et al, 'The Fusion and Creation of Physical Culture' pp.75-87.

Sarah as a western woman, wanting to study such an historically and integrally male pursuit, by the very heart of the military and martial values system was an important development. As Miarka et al. assert,

‘It took the influence of the Western feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s to release Japanese and all international female judokas from their learning and training constraints, so that they could also practice *randori* and *shiai* [contest] at the same level as their male counterparts.’<sup>81</sup>

The class system within Japan relating to *budō* is also an important aspect within this work, helping to establish Sarah’s place within society, both in Britain and Japan. At its foundation, following the First Sino-Japanese war, members of the Butokukai were almost exclusively middle-class Japanese males.<sup>82</sup> These included, amongst others, members of the police, militia, farm owners and merchant classes. However, by the 1930s, the membership had grown, and Gainty describes it thus:

‘It boasted more than three million members from a broad range of backgrounds – from rural farmers to urban educators, from residents of the poorest city districts to members of the Imperial Diet, from footsoldiers to statesmen.’<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, women were not generally included as practitioners of the martial techniques, but within Butokukai publications they were referred to and ‘lauded’ as wives, mothers and supporters of the men taking part.<sup>84</sup> The comparison between these observations by Gainty of post *Meiji* Japan and Richard Holt’s assertions on women in sport in Victorian Britain are surprisingly close, denoting women as proponent and paraclete, rather than participant.<sup>85</sup>

During Sarah’s first session at the Kyoto Butokuden she was far from a facilitator or spectator, and to her surprise, Isogai invited her to practise in Kyoto

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<sup>81</sup> Bianca Miarka, Juliana Bastos Marques and Emerson Franchini, ‘Reinterpreting the History of Women’s Judo in Japan’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28:7 2011 p.1017.

<sup>82</sup> Gainty, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic* p.47; Hoare, *A History of Judo* p.94.

<sup>83</sup> Gainty, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic* p.3.

<sup>84</sup> Gainty, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic* p.46.

<sup>85</sup> Gainty, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic* p.46; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) p.347.



whenever Yamamoto was away from Kōbe.<sup>86</sup> Although proud to have this invitation, Sarah's first thoughts were of the bathroom arrangements. At Kōbe, Sarah had a room to herself in which to dress and undress, and she shared the bathroom with the men. At Kyoto, they offered slightly different facilities, and she was given her own bucket of cold water and space to bathe 'in a room which was open on three sides', but had to share the dressing room. Sarah considered the Kōbe facilities to be preferable: 'It is quite impossible to adequately conceal oneself in a bucket'.<sup>87</sup>

As an athlete, this humorous but naïve approach to one of the most prestigious venues for training is reflected in her novice status. It could be considered that an elite *jūdōka*, who had travelled half-way around the world to study, would be striving to train in the most respected venues, with the highest-ranking teachers, but at this stage, this was clearly not the overriding concern for Sarah.

On return to Kōbe, Sarah was attempting to assimilate into the culture and building on her relationships with new friends and acquaintances. She and Miss Adachi, the girl who taught her Japanese, attended the funeral of the son of Mr. Ichiya, the journalist who had been helping Sarah with interpretation and translation. Sarah tried to follow the lead of the Japanese attendees in the complicated traditional ceremony and was surprised when she was treated as a westerner. She copied Adachi and fell upon her knees in front of a 'man standing at the front door' (possibly a priest, or other notary) just as he was about to shake her by the hand:

'He was so surprised to see a foreign woman grovelling at his feet that for a moment he couldn't move, then he shot down and bowed just as I was going to get up. Every time I tried to rise, down he went again and I had to duck too. I thought it would never end!'<sup>88</sup>

Again, a humorous view of an embarrassing occurrence shows a certain inexperience in Sarah's perception of expected behaviour as a westerner. As with the British curiosity for Japanese culture, reciprocal interest in 'The West' through wider society held fast through the inter-war years. Harold Harootunian

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<sup>86</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>87</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>88</sup> Letter Three.

observes, 'a new culturally lived experience was identified with western style'.<sup>89</sup> Following Japan's exit from the League of Nations in 1933, Internationalists sought to continue relations with the west through cultural endeavours with initiatives such as the *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai* (K.B.S.) or Society for International Cultural Relations.<sup>90</sup> Jessamyn Abel relates that 'The historical turns of the K.B.S. show how internationalist rhetoric persisted as the lingua franca of foreign relations.'<sup>91</sup>

Sarah's fascination with her host country's traditions continued, and Koizumi's friend, Sonobe, took Sarah to watch a display of *naginata* by the Duchess Yamanouchi, formerly Princess Fushimi. The art of *naginata* is a form that began, like *jūjutsu*, with the Samurai class, when the long, pole like weapon with a blade attached to the end, was passed to warrior's wives, in order to defend the family and home while their husbands were away fighting elsewhere.<sup>92</sup> Sarah enjoyed the display, despite having sore feet from kneeling for three hours as a member of the audience.

*Naginata* was practised by women across the country. While Sarah was in Kyoto, she had met a young girl whose father lived in America, and she had gone to Japan to study the art at the Butokukai for three years. Sarah was concerned for the girl's 'spirit': 'She has to live with her teacher who makes her do all the housework and look after the children and a grandmother besides doing the gardening. And for this she has to pay!'<sup>93</sup>

Conversely, Sarah's friendship with her teacher Yamamoto had continued to develop. The following excerpt from the letters gives a fascinating insight into the relationship between a master and pupil, taking into consideration the

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<sup>89</sup> Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000) p.15.

<sup>90</sup> Jessamyn R. Abel, 'Cultural Internationalism and Japan's Wartime Empire: The Turns of the *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai*,' in Masato Kimura and Toshihiro Minohara (eds), *Tumultuous Decade: Empire, Society, and Diplomacy in 1930s Japan* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press 2013) p.17; also see *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, Prospectus and Scheme* (Tokyo: A Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai Publication 1934); *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, A Handbook of International Cultural Organizations in Japan* (Tokyo: A Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai Publication 1936).

<sup>91</sup> Abel, 'Cultural Internationalism' p.17.

<sup>92</sup> Ellis Amdur 'The History and Development of Naginata,' *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 4/1 (1995) pp.32-49; Ellis Amdur 'The role of arms-bearing women in Japanese history,' *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 5/2 (1996) pp.10-35; Karl F. Friday, *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2004) p.86.

<sup>93</sup> Letter Three.

unusual nature of this particular pupil. It must be remembered that Sarah was not only foreign, and a woman, but thirty-seven years old. The excerpt also demonstrates the complexity of relationships between non-familial genders in Japan at this time.

‘Mr. Yamamoto sometimes comes to dinner with me and says that it is the first time that he has ever been alone with any woman except his wife. He hasn't even walked in the street with one before although he generally takes me for a walk after judo. Mr. Ichiya tells me that no one will mistake our relations for other than those of teacher and pupil as Mr. Yamamoto has set an example of morality to the youth of Kobe. But I must say that for a man who has never been alone with a woman, he bears the ordeal with remarkable fortitude. Armed with two dictionaries we are able to correspond and spend quite an agreeable evening and he doesn't seem to want to go home until half past eleven or twelve’.<sup>94</sup>

Significantly, Sarah also described how she accepted the conventions of the master/pupil relationship, waiting for him to have a bath first, allowing him to enter or leave a room before her, and walking a few steps behind him in the street. In fact, she noted in her letter that although Yamamoto knew no other foreigners he had ‘heard of [their] ways’ and had initially attempted to give her western considerations, however she had rejected the concept, worried that it might ‘look ridiculous and annoy all the others.’<sup>95</sup> This juxtaposition between Yamamoto's behaviour to Sarah in public and in private, and Sarah's acceptance of such, despite his initial inclination to treat her in a western manner, speaks of her willingness to ‘fit in’ and assimilate into the local culture.

The public image of the relationship between the sensei Yamamoto, and his student Sarah seems also to have conflicted with western ideals of the period. In a particular incident, a man who, from the context of the letter, was either British or American, stopped Sarah in the street when she was out with Yamamoto. He said that ‘it made his blood boil to see [her] let a man go ahead’. Sarah's described response was that she would prefer that over upsetting the

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<sup>94</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>95</sup> Letter Three.

men at the Butokukai, and not showing due respect for her teacher.<sup>96</sup> She then launched into a diatribe on the western men she had met in Japan, and how ‘all of them without one exception’ had insulted the way Japanese men treated women, while following up with a pass at her. How true this was is impossible to know, and it must be remembered that this letter was addressed to a Japanese man. She commented that ‘the “prestige of the white woman” can be upheld as well on the mat as anywhere.’ Lewis discusses the strange juxtaposition for the white woman in the ‘Oriental’ sphere:

‘women came to understand themselves as beneficiaries of a structure of systemic differences that, whilst [placing] them as superior in the West/East divide of colonialism (the relative privilege of the woman traveler [sic] in the Orient), also placed them as other and inferior in the gendered divides of European ... society.’<sup>97</sup>

Whether Sarah thought of herself as superior or inferior within the Japanese social sphere is unclear, but she seemed keen to assimilate publicly into the conventional hierarchy with Yamamoto, if not the gendered norm. Her time with Yamamoto however was coming to an end, and the conclusion of the third letter augurs Sarah’s next move. She mentioned how Hatta Ichiro had written to her again, offering to teach her judo and asking whether she would like to visit the historical and cultural tourist destination of Kamakura. Considering whether this might be ‘proper’ behavior, she joked that she would ‘try anything once’, adding that the next time that Yamamoto was away, she would travel across to Tokyo.<sup>98</sup>

#### 4.4 Letter Four, July 1934-September 1934

##### **Letter Four, 501. 4 Chome, Setagaya, Setagaya-Ku, Tokyo. 12 September 1934**

‘Ichiro Hatta met me at Tokyo station when I came here at the end of July  
intending to stay for a fortnight.’

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<sup>96</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>97</sup> Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge 1996) p.5.

<sup>98</sup> Letter Three.

Hatta was a Kōdōkan *jūdōka*. He had competed as a wrestler in the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles (judo was not included in the Olympics until 1964), and taught wrestling and judo at Waseda University. He lived with his parents in Setagaya-ku, on the edge of Tokyo.

As requested, Sarah wired through to Hatta which train she would be taking to Tokyo, and he was there to meet her. Refusing to allow her to stay in an hotel, he offered his own family home for her use. It was the middle of summer, and true to his word, Hatta took Sarah sightseeing.

‘We went to Nikko with only one suitcase between us into which his mother helped me to pack our clothes, and stayed at the same hotel. Then we went to the Mount Fuji lakes and to Atami.’



19. Photograph of Hatta Ichiro, 1934, reproduced by kind permission of The Richard Bowen Collection.

This trip was very public. Hatta had informed the newspapers that the two of them were going away together, and in Sarah's words 'nobody seemed to think we were doing anything unconventional'.<sup>99</sup> In fact, Sarah was struck once again by the contradictions between Western and Japanese conventionality. What she saw as a married woman and a single man going away together with one suitcase between them, something that was unlikely to have been publicised in inter-war Britain, was not defined in Japan in the same way. Perhaps the very

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<sup>99</sup> Letter Four, from Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gunji, 12 September 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

fact that she was married gave license for this interaction. Hatta was viewed as a member of the establishment taking a foreign visitor on a tourist excursion, which, as demonstrated earlier within this chapter, was key to economic regeneration, and he was therefore carrying out his civic duty.

Another challenging and culturally disparate aspect of the sightseeing trips to spa areas for Sarah, was the issue of 'public' or mixed sex nudity.

'People don't seem to mind being seen with no clothes on - at one hot spring there was a private bathroom intended for honeymoon couples. To everyone's amusement I insisted on having it, but there was no lock to the door and no sooner was I ready to get into the bath, than a man came in and insisted on washing my back. I didn't know enough Japanese to argue.'<sup>100</sup>

This latter statement seems a rather weak response from a woman, capable of self-defence techniques or objection using the multi-cultural method of body language at the very least. This is further evidence of the self-conscious autobiographical censorship of these letters, intending to entertain and perhaps aiming at a wider readership than just Koizumi. To relate this story to a Japanese man, however anglicised, must have been meant to cause either titillation or humour. Sarah was not necessarily explaining Japanese ways as she saw them to a man fundamentally 'of' that culture, but by demonstrating her reactions to such, she revealed her awareness of the cultural differences. Sarah was following a tradition of westerners commenting on the Japanese apparent lack of reserve in dishabille. As far back as the 1850s when Commander Matthew Perry forced Japan to open up to trade, he was shocked by 'A scene at one of the public baths, where the sexes mingled indiscriminately, unconscious of their nudity', and Isabella Bird often mentioned the lack of clothing of the lower classes during her travels.<sup>101</sup>

Sarah was clearly enjoying the cultural novelty. Hatta's mother and father had welcomed her into their home, and when her fortnight's visit was over, Ichiro's

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<sup>100</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>101</sup> Francis L. Hawks (ed), *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to China Seas and Japan* (Washington: Beverley Tucker 1856) p.405; Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (London: John Murray 1880).

father, a retired admiral of the Japanese Navy, had insisted that she stay with them and 'get rid of' her house in Kōbe.<sup>102</sup> She did not mention the logistics of moving house, or that she ever returned to Kōbe, but it could be assumed that she took a trip back to collect her things and say her goodbyes.

Having the spirit of freedom could not compete with a lack of independent wealth however, and Sarah wrote to Robert to ask if she could stay a little longer than planned. To continue to stay in Japan, she needed permission from the holder of the purse. This evidence strengthens the view that the trip was financed by her husband. She had been married for the second time for ten years, without an apparent personal income. Therefore, the idea that she may have paid for her own sojourn is unlikely.

The reasons given by Sarah to Koizumi for wanting to stay longer were threefold; a chance to see the cherry blossom again, and to improve both her language and judo skills. The reasons she gave to Robert are unknown. The intention had been to return home before Christmas, which would have entailed leaving around October. Cherry blossom season in Tokyo typically occurs in April. This means Sarah was asking Robert not only to finance the longer stay, but to live without his wife for another six months. The letter was written in September, so it did not give much notice.

Another of the reasons for wanting to stay longer, seems to have been due to Sarah's contact with 'the famous Mr. Mifune.'

'I practiced with him once at the Kodokan and often sit and watch him. He is extraordinary. Very frail and delicate, very small and looks quite old. He was in a playful mood when I practiced with him. He just threw me round the room as if I were an India rubber ball, and when I tried any throw, he simply wasn't there any longer.'<sup>103</sup>

Mifune Kyūzō was a senior instructor at the Kōdōkan, known for his superior speed and skill, and was taught by Kanō himself and the legendary 'Demon'

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<sup>102</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>103</sup> Letter Four.

Yokoyama.<sup>104</sup> Incredibly, Mifune agreed to teach Sarah alone one morning every week and allowed her to attend his sessions in various *dōjō* around Tokyo, where she could practise with him.



20. Photograph of Sarah Mayer and Mifune Kyūzō, c.1934, reproduced by kind permission of The Richard Bowen Collection.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Mifune's acceptance of Sarah as a *jūdōka*, not only in terms of this thesis, but for women's judo history. Sarah told Koizumi about a comment made by Mifune to Hatta; 'that if I could stay here till the spring he could make me "quite strong"'.<sup>105</sup> This would seem to have been a considerable motivation for Sarah's wish to extend her trip for a further six months.

In addition to the weekly private lessons with Mifune and her attendance at his other sessions, Sarah trained with Hatta in the afternoons, mainly at Waseda University. She also said that she practised at Mr. Sato's *dōjō*, a fact corroborated by a press cutting held at The Bowen Collection with her letters.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> John Stevens, *The Way of Judo: A Portrait of Jigoro Kano and his Students* (Boston and London: Shambhala 2013) p.148; Nicklaus Suino, *Budo Mind and Body: Training Secrets of the Japanese Martial Arts* (Boston and London: Weatherhill 2006) p.2.

<sup>105</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>106</sup> Japanese press cuttings attached to the Sarah Mayer letters and referred to in such, no name of newspaper or date shown, C.64, R.B.C.



(Sato Kinnosuke was later to become briefly involved in the film industry in Tokyo, working as the judo coach on a film called *Sugata Sanshiro* in 1943, about the rivalry between *jūjutsu* and judo.<sup>107</sup>) Sarah joked that she had a 'costume' in every *dōjō*, 'Like the sailors who have a wife in every port', she also noted the price of a full set of *jūdōgi* in Japan at that time was around ¥3.50, which she considered cheap. This is the approximate amount paid by Sarah for one night's stay at the Yamato Hotel in Kōbe.

Sarah sometimes participated at the wrestling *dōjō* at Waseda University, where Hatta was also the teacher. She explained how the atmosphere differed to the judo *dōjō*. 'The boys shout encouragement to me and howl "Chance-Chance" and applaud loudly if anything I try comes off.'<sup>108</sup> She described too the difference in culture and gender which was manifest with these younger acquaintances and how they reacted to her as a foreign woman:

'I like the University students. The great joke is for them to carry my parcels or let me go through a door first. As soon as I appear with anything in my hand, it is seized by one of these youths and carried in triumph, whilst the others hold their sides with laughter.'<sup>109</sup>

She continued:

'When a Japanese [man] wants to let a woman go first, he usually gives her a good push in the small of the back, and I have not yet got used to being treated in this way by men who I have only just met. With Ichiro I am by now accustomed to it and when he wants to be very polite, he gives me such a shove through a door that my entrance is far from dignified.'<sup>110</sup>

Conversely, the older generation seemed to be more intent on Sarah conforming to Japanese cultural ways. Ichiro's father had chosen an entirely new outfit of a *kimono* and *obi* for Sarah for the autumn season, even down to the underwear. He was insistent that she wear the wider more traditional *obi*

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<sup>107</sup> Akira Kurosawa and Tomita Tsuneo (novel), *Sugata Sanshiro* Film, [in Japanese] Directed by Akira Kurosawa, Tokyo: Toho Film Company, 1943, IMDB; Stuart Galbraith IV, *The Toho Studios Story: A History and Complete Filmography* (Lanham, Toronto and Plymouth UK: Scarecrow Press 2008) pp.54 and 59.

<sup>108</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>109</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>110</sup> Letter Four.

and was keen for her to wear Japanese rather than western clothes: 'Mr. Hatta always likes me to wear them and even wants me to go out in the street in them'.<sup>111</sup> Sarah's comment that Hatta senior wanted her to wear Japanese clothing outside implies that she hadn't been doing so previously. However, she did write that she usually wore a thick Kimono with a narrow *obi*, so it is possible that she had already taken to wearing this style indoors.

Interest in Sarah from the Japanese press continued, and Sarah sent Koizumi some more newspaper cuttings. Like the first cuttings she sent, these have not survived with the letters held in the archive, but Sarah described how they were not necessarily true representations of her words or deeds. It would seem that her naturally darker eyebrows under her bleached blonde hair made the writers think that she was wearing a dark makeup, and Sarah joked, 'I certainly never take a powder puff into the *dōjō* with me, and the "painted eyebrows" that would survive judo in Japanese summer have yet to be discovered!'<sup>112</sup>

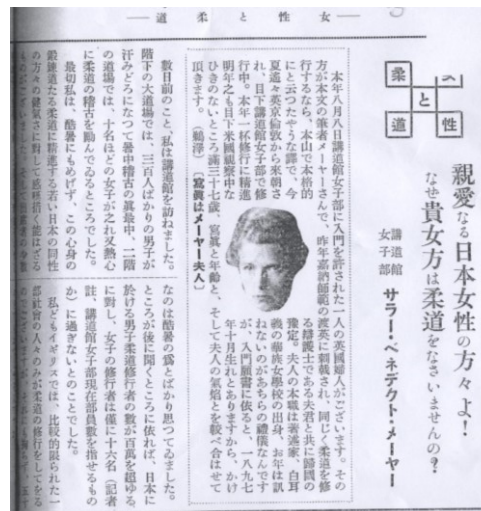
The other cutting that Sarah sent to Koizumi was an article that she had been asked to write, encouraging Japanese women to take up judo. This surprising development contributes hugely to the thesis, showing that Sarah was not only being affected by judo in Japan but having an effect as a role model on women's participation. Although the cutting has not been found, in October, the Kōdōkan's *Judo* magazine (柔道) ran an article written by Sarah with what appears to be the same information as described in her letter.<sup>113</sup> The letter was written on or before 12 September 1934, therefore, either the magazine was printed and produced in advance of its October issue date, or Sarah sent Koizumi her own copy of the text.

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<sup>111</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>112</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>113</sup> Sarah Mayer, 'Women and Judo,' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) October 1934 pp.40-41, Kōdōkan Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].



21. 'Women and Judo' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) October 1934.

This article was found along with a number of other documents, at the Kōdōkan Museum and Archive in Tokyo. The content of the piece holds great significance for Sarah's contribution to women's judo in Japan, and for Anglo-Japanese relations. Entitled *Women and Judo*, the article, in Japanese, began 'Dear Japanese ladies, why don't you try judo?'<sup>114</sup> In a short introduction, not written by Sarah, she was described as an English lady whose profession was a playwright and that she joined the Kōdōkan on 8 August. If this date is accurate, it means that it had only taken Ichiro a week or two to introduce her to the Kōdōkan once she had arrived in Tokyo. The piece then gave Sarah's age, and set into the centre of the introduction was a photograph of her head, with a solemn expression on her face.

The article gives a fascinating insight into the motivations of the Japanese judo establishment, regarding their acceptance of Sarah, when viewed in conjunction with Sarah's comments in her letter. The article continued with Sarah's words:

'I visited the Kōdōkan a few days ago. There in the large hall approximately three hundred men, all covered in sweat, were hard at work practising judo in the heat of the summer, while in the *dōjō* upstairs, around ten ladies were also practising.'<sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Mayer, 'Women and Judo'.

<sup>115</sup> Mayer, 'Women and Judo'.

She went on to say that ‘despite more than one million men in Japan practising judo, only sixteen women participate in this discipline’.<sup>116</sup> An editor’s note informed the reader that this was the number of women registered at the Kōdōkan. Sarah then stated that women practising at the Budokwai numbered close to fifty. This vastly overestimated the actual amount, as Sarah commented in her letter, ‘I think we should have a job to find 10 women at the Budokwai on ladies’ night - but I was asked to write in that way in order to stimulate the interest of Japanese women’.<sup>117</sup>

It is worth noting that in 1908, Matsudaira Tsuneo (diplomat and statesman) had given a lecture for the Japan Society in London, entitled ‘Sports and Physical Training in Modern Japan’. The speech was designed to promote judo and *jūjutsu*, however he had some concerns over the numbers and abilities of women taking up the art.

‘The question may arise, whether in Japan either Judo or Jujitsu has become popular with the young ladies. My answer is in the negative. Many attempts seem to have been made to persuade ladies to practise it as their physical training, even modifying the form of Judo, but so far they have not been successful, except in a very few instances.’<sup>118</sup>

Why members of the Kōdōkan establishment, would consider that Sarah encouraging Japanese women to take up judo would help is uncertain. The possibilities are not clear cut, having interrelated arguments. It could be connected to the drive to promote women’s physical education through such Japanese constructs as *ryōsai-kembo* (literally good wife, wise mother), the term originally coined by Nakamura Masanao in the 1870s and, according to Sharon Sievers, designed to produce ‘a stronger Japan’.<sup>119</sup> As Ikeda asserts, *ryōsai-kembo* along with ‘Liberal Education and Maternal Feminism’ were used in phases for the development of female education:

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<sup>116</sup> Mayer, ‘Women and Judo’.

<sup>117</sup> Letter Four.

<sup>118</sup> Matsudaira Tsuneo, ‘Sports and Physical Training in Modern Japan,’ *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society London* 8 (1907/1909) p.120.

<sup>119</sup> Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press 1983) p.22.

‘*Budō* was adopted for women’s physical education in the 1930s and during the [Second World] war. Women were not subject to military conscription, suggesting that a disciplined training of both the mind and the body was the objective.’<sup>120</sup>

The Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa interest in the British public school ideals of sportsmanship, or *kyōugi-do*, argued by Abe and Mangan to have begun with F.W. Strange in the 1870s,<sup>121</sup> along with systems of education, and ‘western’ values of modernism, might therefore have presented Sarah as a positive role model for Japanese women.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, Sarah could have been construed as a reliable informant on judo for women in Britain, and stating that a large number of females practised judo at the Budokwai may have encouraged Japanese women into the *dōjō*.

In the article, Sarah complimented the facilities for women at the Kōdōkan, whilst gently criticising those at the Budokwai, including the women’s *dōjō* and the changing rooms. Another comparison made was the availability of practice sessions, i.e. every day at the Kōdōkan, as opposed to twice weekly at the Budokwai. This directly countermands the Japanese admiration and aspiration towards the British systems, and is consistent with judo being inherently Japanese, contrary to other sports, pastimes, or philosophies assimilating ‘from’ the west.<sup>123</sup>

The article continued and addressed concerns surrounding Japanese women’s femininity.

‘Do you think judo is too rough and tough for ladies?’

‘Do you think judo will make ladies masculine?’

‘Do you think judo will make ladies aggressive?’<sup>124</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Keiko Ikeda, ‘Ryōsai-Kembo, Liberal Education and Maternal Feminism under Fascism: Women and Sport in Modern Japan,’ *International Journal of the History of Sport* 27:3 (2010) p.545.

<sup>121</sup> Ikuo Abe and J.A. Mangan, “‘Sportsmanship’ English Inspiration and Japanese Response: F.W. Strange and Chiyosaburo Takeda,’ *International Journal of the History of Sport* 19:2-3 (2002) pp.99-128.

<sup>122</sup> Keiko Ikeda, ‘From Ryōsai-Kembo to Nadeshiko: Women and Sports in Japan’ in Jennifer Hargreaves and Eric Anderson (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge 2014) pp.97-105.

<sup>123</sup> Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii 2001) pp.67-95.

<sup>124</sup> Mayer, ‘Women and Judo’.

Sarah's article vehemently disavowed the concept of femininity being challenged by judo, stating that 'losing charm and grace ... is definitely not true', adding, 'Judo is a really magnificent exercise. For young ladies it is a good way to keep their youth and beauty and be intellectual.'<sup>125</sup> This latter statement is testament to a changing society, both in Japan and Britain.<sup>126</sup> The use of intellect as encouragement for women relates to the improvement of educational aims for girls, specifically those of Kanō. His position as educator, as well as judo technician was inherent through the Kōdōkan system.<sup>127</sup>

Further to her comments on femininity, Sarah's message advised the Japanese female of her place within her own cultural identity:

'Even as a foreigner, I can see a significant improvement of character and physique in the men who practice judo compared to those who do not. I truly hope that the day when people can see these qualities in ladies will come soon in Japan.'<sup>128</sup>

The incredible audacity of these comments, speaks loudly of the 'prestige of the white woman' so charmingly dismissed by Sarah in an earlier letter.<sup>129</sup> The white man's so-called 'prestige' was considered by Carl Crow in the 1940s to have been self-effected and indulged by the 'natives'.<sup>130</sup> But the fact that Sarah was encouraging Japanese women to engage with judo, also contrasted with her stated opinion in her letter on the style of women's judo practised at the Kōdōkan.

She confirmed the quality of the ladies' *dōjō*, as written in the article, but followed with, 'The girls are altogether too polite to each other. They never try to

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<sup>125</sup> Mayer, 'Women and Judo'.

<sup>126</sup> See for example, Yumiko Ehara 'Japanese Social Theory and Gender Equality,' in Anthony Elliott, Masataka Katagiri and Atsushi Sawai (eds), *Japanese Social Theory: From Individualization to Globalization in Japan today* (New York: Routledge 2013) pp.162-175; Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* p.5; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change* (London and New York: Routledge 2014) p.1.

<sup>127</sup> For pedagogical aspects regarding Kanō and judo see, Committee for the Commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Birth of Jigoro Kano, *Kano Jigoro: Educator with Spirit and Action* (Tsukuba, Japan: University of Tsukuba Press 2011) [In Japanese]; Tetsuya Nakajima and Lee Thompson, 'Judo and the Process of Nation-Building in Japan: Kanō Jigorō and the Formation of Kōdōkan Judo,' *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 1:2-3 (August 2012) pp.97-110.

<sup>128</sup> Mayer, 'Women and Judo'.

<sup>129</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>130</sup> Carl Crow, *Foreign Devils in the Flowery Kingdom* [first published 1940] (Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books 2007) pp.183-193; Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* p.5.

avoid any throw, but just take it in turns to drop each other gently on the mat.’<sup>131</sup> She then added a conflicting and ambiguous comment regarding a photograph she said she had sent showing her with a second *dan* female. (The photograph does not exist within the archived collection.) Speaking of the woman’s technical ability, Sarah said, ‘but as I’ve never practiced with any of the women I don’t know how good she is.’

Understanding the incongruent nature of this remark requires cross referencing of other statements made by Sarah throughout the sequence of letters, concerning women’s judo at the Kōdōkan. The chronology of reference to Sarah practising at the Kōdōkan is thus:

1. Letter Four, sent 12 September 1934.

- 1.1. ‘Last night Ichiro and I had dinner with the famous Mr. Mifune. I practiced [sic] with him once at the Kodokan.’
- 1.2. ‘Sometimes I go to Mr. Sato’s dojo and sometimes to the Kodokan, as well as many other stray dojos which I come across in the country.’
- 1.3. ‘They certainly have a very nice dojo [Kōdōkan female *dōjō*] but if I couldn’t do judo in any other place I’m afraid I shouldn’t do much.’
- 1.4. ‘The one in the photograph with me is 2-Dan but as I’ve never practiced [sic] with any of the women I don’t know how good she is.’

2. Letter Five, sent 30 September 1934.

- 2.1. ‘Hitherto I had rather avoided the Kodokan because they refused to let me go into the big dojo and I didn’t like the woman’s section which is rather like a young ladies’ school.’
- 2.2. ‘However, Professor Kano would not hear of my being banished to the woman’s department and gave orders that I should be admitted to the men’s dojo to practice [sic].’
- 2.3. ‘I went there yesterday and practiced [sic] with two men.’

To dissect these quotes, they divide neatly into two parts. The first in Letter Four, and the second in Letter Five. The quotes in Letter Four speaking of

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<sup>131</sup> Letter Four.

Sarah's participation at the Kōdōkan begin with reference to Mifune (1.1). Sarah used the phrase 'I practiced with him once at the Kodokan', therefore it must be assumed that she trained at the Kōdōkan before 12 September. Whether this was in the male or female *dōjō* is unclear.<sup>132</sup>

Continuing with the same letter, Sarah said 'sometimes [I go to] the Kodokan' (1.2). Again, she did not specify which *dōjō*, but it could be considered that she would have differentiated between training with men and women. Sarah's comment that she would not get much practice if she were only to train with women (1.3), would seem to corroborate this theory. Therefore, if Letter Four is taken alone as evidence, the three references would imply that Sarah was already practising at the Kōdōkan before she met Professor Kanō, which happened after that letter and before the next.

The letter dated less than three weeks later, seems to differ regarding the Kōdōkan. In this letter Sarah stated that she had not practised much at the Kōdōkan, as she had not been allowed into the male *dōjō* (2.1), even though, in the previous letter she said that she had never practised with any of the women (1.4). The final contradictory evidence for Sarah's early training at the Kōdōkan is presented by her statement that Professor Kanō 'gave orders that [she] should be admitted to the men's *dōjō*' (2.2). This comes chronologically after the comments about practising at the Kōdōkan and combined with 'I went there yesterday and practised with two men' which, when taken in context, implies that this was her first visit to the male *dōjō*, and would give a date of 29 September 1934 as her first session in the male *dōjō* at the Kōdōkan.

Within the introduction to the article by Sarah, as noted previously, her entry to the Kōdōkan was given as 8 August 1934, therefore, if her first session in the male *dōjō* was 29 September 1934, then she must have been training in the women's *dōjō* in the interim period. This would mean that her comment about never having practised with any of the women in Letter Four, dated 12 September, could imply that she felt that the women's sessions were not actual

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<sup>132</sup> Motohashi Hanako, '講道館柔道十段物語 戦後柔道界を支えた名人 三船久蔵 [The Story of Kōdōkan Judo Tenth Dan (4) Mifune Kyūzō, Supporter of the Judo World after the War],' *Judo* 80:9 (2009) pp.4-13 [in Japanese].



'practice' sessions, as there was no free *randori* as such, where one player sought to 'beat' the other.

The final aspect of this article of interest to this thesis, concerns the assertion by Sarah that 'In England, people who practice judo are from certain parts of society'.<sup>133</sup> Assuming that Sarah's comment implies the wealthier classes, this is confirmed by the research found in Chapter Three of this work.

According to Keiko Fukuda, who joined in 1935, the Kōdōkan too 'was mainly open to women of upper-class society when I began my study'.<sup>134</sup> This gives an interesting correlation between the female aspect of judo history in Japan and Britain, which otherwise, according to Sarah, were very different. Fukuda stressed that judo training for women in Japan emphasized form, and there was no competition between women, only the conation of 'techniques, speed and agility', and that they did not engage with the 'rough and tumble' of men's judo.<sup>135</sup> Sarah, on the other hand, was very keen to engage with the rough and tumble of the men's game, and through her rejection of the women's *dōjō* the perception of her as different was perpetuated, thus helping to explain the possible reasons for the way she was treated differently to Japanese women by the judo establishment.

This article in the magazine produced by the Kōdōkan has given the first clear evidence of Sarah being used by the judo establishment as a role model for women in Japan. The analysis of the text in the article against the letters also demonstrates that it is in Tokyo, at the foundational home of judo, where we first see Sarah actively choose male practice over female, a significant moment in both judo and gender histories.

The next letter shows the extent of her involvement with the man who could be described not only as the establishment, but the establisher of the concept of judo, Jigorō Kanō, who also supported Sarah's wish to stay in the rough environs of the male *dōjō*. But first there was a different form of tempest to be negotiated.

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<sup>133</sup> Mayer, 'Women and Judo'.

<sup>134</sup> Keiko Fukuda, *Born for the Mat: A Kodokan Kata Textbook for Women* (San Francisco: For the Author 1973) p.11.

<sup>135</sup> Quote from Pauline Wong in Anthony De Leonardis, 'The weaker (?) sex is organizing,' *Black Belt* 4:11 (1966) p.43.

#### 4.5 Letter Five, September 1934-September 1934

##### **Letter Five, 501. 4-chome, Setagaya, Setagaya-Ku, Tokyo. 30 September 1934**

‘Last week I met Professor Kano for the first time.’

With this letter, we see Sarah developing her judo skills under elite tutelage, and we witness the judo establishment, through Hatta, utilising her abilities as an organiser to aid with foreign visitors. The letter begins in dramatic fashion, with the description of a journey to Osaka alongside some of the boys from Waseda and a team of visiting Hawaiian wrestlers. On 21 September 1934, the group of eighteen young men, accompanied by Ichiro and Sarah, set off in the morning from Tokyo to travel by train to Osaka for matches. They were unaware that one of the most catastrophic storms in Japanese history had already hit the southern point of Honshu and was heading north along the coast.<sup>136</sup>

Later known as the Muroto Typhoon, the storm hit Osaka that morning, causing extensive flooding, ruination of buildings, and loss of life.<sup>137</sup> The journey from Tokyo was difficult for the group due to the weather, and they had to change trains several times.

‘We arrived very late and deposited our boys and the Hawaiians with the parents of one of the party ... When we found the house it was half down and the front wall in ruins. However, the hostess came to the door with a candle and took them all in and Ichiro and another boy and I went in search of food for them, and a hotel for me.

‘There was no water to be had and very little food and the lights had all gone out but we managed somehow.’<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> K. Wadati and T. Hirono, ‘Storm Tides Caused by Typhoons,’ Paper delivered at UNESCO Symposium on Typhoons, Tokyo, 9-12 November 1954 [online]  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001316/131628EB.pdf> (accessed July 2018).

<sup>137</sup> Pingping Luo et al, ‘Assessment of Japanese and Chinese Flood Control Policies,’ in *Annals of Disaster Prevention Research Institute, Kyoto University* 53B (2010) pp.61-70 [online]  
<http://www.dpri.kyoto-u.ac.jp/nenpo/no53/ronbunB/a53b0p07.pdf> (accessed July 2018).

<sup>138</sup> Letter Five, Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gunji, 30 September 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

The following morning, the true extent of the damage could be seen, and Sarah described it 'as if there had been an air raid the previous night'.<sup>139</sup> Buildings had been reduced to piles of wood and debris and many people had been killed or injured. Sarah did not say much more in her letter, 'You will have read all about it in the papers so there is no need for me to tell you any more. The terrible toll of schools was the most tragic feature of the disaster'.<sup>140</sup> The group had managed to come away from the trip unscathed, but the storm went down in history as one of the worst meteorological disasters Japan had seen, with over 3,000 lives lost.<sup>141</sup>

Sarah had more positive news next. She had been introduced to Professor Kanō who had returned to Tokyo from a meeting of the Olympic Committee. She said that they had met for the first time 'last week', implying that they had not done so on Kanō's last trip to Britain in August 1933.<sup>142</sup> In 1933, Sarah's standing at the Budokwai had been much lower than on her return from Japan and there were other women of higher rank who were more likely to have been introduced to Kanō.

But this was Sarah's moment. Ichiro was a close ally of the Professor.<sup>143</sup> Sarah was nervous of meeting such a prestigious man, but after being introduced, she found him to be 'a charming old gentleman with European manners who greeted me warmly and made me feel quite at home'.<sup>144</sup> The most surprising aspect of this meeting from a modern perspective, is Kanō's interest in Sarah, if the content of her letter to Koizumi is to be believed.

'He seems most anxious to help me and asked me whether I only wished to get some practice or whether I wanted to learn as much about the real meaning of Judo as was possible in a short time. I told him that I was as

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<sup>139</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>140</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>141</sup> Y. Tsuchiya and K. Kawata, 'Historical Changes of Storm-Surge Disasters in Osaka,' in Mohammed I. El-Sabh and Tad S. Murty, *Natural and Man-Made Hazards: Proceedings of the International Symposium held at Rimouski, Quebec, Canada, 3-9 August 1986* (Dordrecht, Boston, Lancaster and Tokyo: D. Reidel Publishing 1988) p.295; Takao Kenji et al, 'Factors Determining Residents' Preparedness for Floods in Modern Megalopolises: The Case of the Tokai Flood Disaster in Japan,' *Journal of Risk Research* 7:7-8 (2004) pp.775-787.

<sup>142</sup> Printed leaflet advertising a course of lectures on judo by Jigorō Kanō, 28 August 1933, C.61, R.B.C.; 'The Philosophy of Judo' *The Times* 29 August 1933 p.8.

<sup>143</sup> Stevens, *The Way of Judo* p.108.

<sup>144</sup> Letter Five.

much interested in the philosophical side as in the actual practice which seemed to please him and he asked me to come again when he had had time to formulate a plan for my study'.<sup>145</sup>

There are many questions raised by this short extract. Why did Kanō show an interest in Sarah at all? Was there anything to be gained by encouraging this fourth *kyū* British woman, or was it purely a philanthropic gesture? Was he just showing his western 'manners' with courtesy to a visitor?

To have Kanō 'formulate a plan' for one's study accords an enormity of prestige, which cannot be overstated. His working life away from judo was based in the education system, where, following graduation in politics and economics, he began to teach at Gakushuin, or Peers School, in Tokyo, later becoming the principal of the Tokyo Higher Normal School, a national teacher training institution.<sup>146</sup> Despite his calls for patriotism, his political aspirations were inherently associated with international collaboration and one of his overriding principles of judo was *jita kyoei*, or mutual co-operation and prosperity.<sup>147</sup> In January 1934, Kanō had written a piece for the international press extolling the virtues of judo, which concluded with,

'Jiudo [sic] envisages the full exploitation of this wonderful world of ours for the physical, mental, and spiritual betterment and fuller happiness of every man, woman and child. As such I hope that it will one day command universal approval and adoption.'<sup>148</sup>

He was a member of the International Olympic Committee, and the bid for The Tokyo Olympic Games was being planned and fought for during Sarah's time in Japan.<sup>149</sup> Polley describes how the British Government stepped in to withdraw London's bid to avoid further diplomatic issues with Japan.<sup>150</sup> The ill-fated games, which were abandoned due to the Second Sino-Japanese War, were

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<sup>145</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>146</sup> Shun Inoue, 'Būdō,' in Sepp Linhart and Sabine Frühstück (eds), *The Culture of Japan as Seen through Its Leisure* (New York: State University of New York 1998) p.86; Stevens, *The Way of Judo* pp.41-45; Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.166-167.

<sup>147</sup> Murata, *Mind over Muscle* p.71.

<sup>148</sup> Jigorō Kanō, 'Jiudo [sic] is the Secret of Japan's Forward March' *The Aberdeen Press and Journal* 8 January 1934 p.6.

<sup>149</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.182.

<sup>150</sup> Martin Polley, 'Olympic Diplomacy: The British Government and the Projected 1940 Olympic Games,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9:2 (1992) pp.169-187.

driven by Kanō.<sup>151</sup> It is likely this is one of the reasons for Sarah's welcome and publicity as a distinctly western woman, in order to emphasize the internationalism and modernity of Japan.

The plan Kanō had devised for Sarah followed about a week later.

'I saw him again the day before yesterday and he advised me to practice wherever I liked with Mr. Mifune and Ichiro, or with anyone who held a high degree in Judo. At the same time he insisted upon the importance of learning *Kata* in all its forms thoroughly. For the rest he said that he would talk to me often and explain the ethical side and answer any questions that might occur to me'.<sup>152</sup>

Otaki and Draeger describe *kata* as 'prearranged formal techniques'.<sup>153</sup> Originally inspired by *jūjutsu* methods for practice, Kanō developed Kōdōkan *kata* as an integral training element of judo.<sup>154</sup>

Kanō's plan for Sarah seemed to present no change, and she continued to train with Mifune and Hatta. His emphasis on *kata* was perhaps referencing his system for women, with a higher dependence on the choreographic form.<sup>155</sup> For his offer to speak to Sarah often, the letters show no evidence of this happening. It could be assumed that, had she had regular meetings with Kanō, she would have mentioned them in her letters to Koizumi. However, Kanō's interest in Sarah should not be dismissed. His global aims for judo are well documented within his own writings and actions, and with the arrival of Sarah, a potential new source of publicity and promotional activity overseas landed at his

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<sup>151</sup> International Olympic Committee, 'The Olympic Movement and Kano Jigoro,' [online] [http://www.joc.or.jp/english/historyjapan/kano\\_jigoro.html](http://www.joc.or.jp/english/historyjapan/kano_jigoro.html) (accessed January 2017); Sandra Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics* (London and New York: Routledge 2007) p. 149; The Organizing Committee of The XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940, 'Report of the Organizing Committee on its Work for The XIIth Olympic Games of 1940 in Tokyo until the Relinquishment,' undated but between 1938-1939 [online] <http://library.la84.org/6oic/OfficialReports/1940/OR1940.pdf> (accessed June 2018).

<sup>152</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>153</sup> Tadao Otaki and Donn F. Draeger, *Judo Formal Techniques: A Complete Guide to Kodokan Randori no Kata* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing 1983) p.20.

<sup>154</sup> S. Bradic and M. Callan, 'Kata Training for Judo: Value and Application of Judo Kata to Judo Training,' in M. Callan (ed), *The Science of Judo: Routledge Research in Sport and Exercise Science Series* (Abingdon: Routledge 2018) pp.19-28.

<sup>155</sup> De Leonardis, 'The weaker (?) Sex,' pp.40-45.

feet.<sup>156</sup> As a woman, from the right social group, involved in the theatrical world, with a conceivably high profile, Sarah could perhaps use her performance skills to promote judo, specifically women's judo, in Europe. This possibility might have seemed worthy of a small amount of his time and the attention of his higher ranked disciples to encourage her ambition.

Evidence of Kanō's worldwide aims for women as well as men, comes from Fukuda, who joined the Kōdōkan in the same year that Sarah was training in the male *dōjō*, and was later tasked with the development of women's Kōdōkan judo in the U.S.<sup>157</sup>

'In a Conversation with the late professor Kano, he said to me "I hope to spread Women's Judo throughout the world as widely as Men's Judo.

Miss FUKUDA, you must pursue the study of judo with this in mind.'"<sup>158</sup>

As Kanō died in 1938 this statement was made at some point within three years of his interaction with Sarah, and it can be assumed that his policy to diffuse and encourage women's judo internationally was in his mind at that time.

Sarah found the practice in the main *dōjō* at the Kōdōkan much harder than her previous experiences. At what is likely to be her first session, she was paired with two men: a sixth *dan* and an eighth *dan*. Despite intensive training in Japan for the previous six months or so, Sarah was still a comparative novice. She found these 'sparring' partners to be 'very kind but rather exhausting ... in fact after the first I was very tired and when another one came up at once and asked me to practice with him I had to say that I must have a rest first.'<sup>159</sup> This was not proper *dōjō* etiquette, and she was reprimanded later by Ichiro, who told her she must not reject an offer of a practice by anyone, let alone someone of such high rank. In her usual style, Sarah managed to give a humorous aside to the story: 'but if the Prince of Wales had come up at that minute and asked me to dance I should have had to make some excuse!'<sup>160</sup> She had even joked with Ichiro that

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<sup>156</sup> For English language versions of Kanō's writings see, Murata, *Mind over Muscle*; Hoare, *A History of Judo*; Jigorō Kanō, 'Principles of Judo and their Applications to All Phases of Human Activity,' lecture given at the Parnassus Society, Athens, Greece, 5 June 1934, and reprinted as 'Principles of Judo,' *Judo Quarterly Bulletin* (April 1948) pp.37-42.

<sup>157</sup> De Leonardis, 'The weaker (?) Sex' pp.40-45.

<sup>158</sup> Fukuda, *Born for the Mat* p.10.

<sup>159</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>160</sup> Letter Five.

she might ask Professor Kanō to provide her with an armchair to relax in between bouts.

Sarah wrote that Ichiro was 'keen to come to England for six months when I go back', and she asked Koizumi if he would be able to facilitate this in any way.<sup>161</sup> The Budokwai was not run as a profitable business, but as a club or society with subscriptions, which Koizumi had been helping to support financially since its foundation in 1918.<sup>162</sup> There would be little money to help Ichiro, although, as a disciple of Kanō, he would be a much appreciated visitor and extra coach. A comment by Sarah regarding her own support of this enterprise gives yet more evidence of her own lack of fiscal independence. 'I will help in any way I can but once I am home it may not be too easy for me to do very much financially.'<sup>163</sup>

Sarah had not yet heard from Robert whether she was permitted to stay any longer in Japan. However, she appeared to have decided that she would stay at least until November, as she stated that she was 'very pleased' to be able to see the planned fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Kōdōkan.<sup>164</sup> In fact, Sarah was to play a part in the event.

However, before the festivities, Sarah appeared in another article in the November 1934 issue of *Judo* magazine, providing more evidence for the acceptance of her judo ambition, as well as a consideration of her fame and standing within the community at that point. The article shows that Ichiro and Sarah took time away from Tokyo to visit Maebashi Butokuden in the Gunma prefecture.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>162</sup> Richard Bowen, *100 Years of Judo in Great Britain Volume 1* (Brighton: IndePenPress 2011) p.334.

<sup>163</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>164</sup> Letter Five.

<sup>165</sup> Ichiro Hatta, 'Mrs Mayer's Judo Practice,' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) November 1934 p.29, Kōdōkan Museum and Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].



22. 'Mrs. Mayer's Judo Practice' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) November 1934.

The report, written by Ichiro, was the second piece to focus on Sarah in as many months. They travelled on 9 October 1934 and visited 'several' *dōjō* in the area. She was a guest at the Isezaki Primary School, where she spoke to pupils and spectators with Ichiro as interpreter. What she spoke about is not recorded. On 11 October, she was permitted to practice at the Butokuden, where she met Iizuka Kunisaburo. Iizuka was another of the great judo men with whom Sarah came into contact, who would later become one of the illustrious tenth *dan* recipients.<sup>166</sup> Following the training session, Sarah accompanied Iizuka and a small group who climbed the mountain to Ikaho, a hot spring resort, to 'enjoy the Autumn scenery'.<sup>167</sup> The page holding the article had a cartoon in the title corner of three people wearing conical hats, climbing the side of a mountain.

There were also two photographs on the page. The first was an image inside the Butokuden, seemingly empty apart from Sarah, splayed out on the *tatami*,

<sup>166</sup> Motohashi Hanako, '講道館柔道十段物語 一押し二引き三かわせ、技は力の 花とこそ知れ 飯塚国三郎 [The Story of Kōdōkan Judo Tenth Dan (5) Iizuka Kunisaburo],' *Judo* 81:1 (2010) pp.5-14 [In Japanese].

<sup>167</sup> Hatta, 'Mrs Mayer's Judo Practice'.



being held down by a Mr. Sasahara, noted as sixth *dan*. The second was of a small group having a meal around a low table. The caption named the people as Sarah Mayer, Mr. Iizuka, Mr. Itagaki, Mr. Hatta, and Mr. Sasahara. Sarah was in the centre wearing a western style jacket and Ichiro was on the left in a pale three-piece suit and tie; the three other men wore Japanese kimono.<sup>168</sup>

Rather amusingly, in this report on the trip written by Ichiro, a translation shows that Sarah was quoted as saying,

‘I have met and made friends with many judo practitioners since I arrived in Japan. I have found that they are all kind, true gentleman. I was unaware of this fact before I came here. I now know that judo practitioners are superior people compared to those who have never tried judo’.<sup>169</sup>

The article finished with the fact that Sarah was planning to return to England in May after the cherry blossom season and that she was intending to teach judo there.

Although, at first glance, seemingly light in content, this article is worthy of attention within this thesis for three main reasons. Firstly, the fact that the publishers of the *Kōdōkan* magazine considered that Sarah was interesting enough to run a piece on her in two consecutive issues, gives an indication of the degree to which the judo establishment were aware of, and promoted her trip to Japan, and her judo ambition. Secondly, the article provides evidence that Sarah’s experience with the Butokukai was not limited to Kōbe and Kyoto, nor was her acceptance within such reliant on particular personalities and their views on women or westerners, but was a continued theme throughout her trip. And thirdly, it shows her interaction with yet another of the most senior *Kōdōkan* men.

Sarah was mentioned again in the November 1934 issue of *Judo*, in a report of money received in honour of the fiftieth anniversary.<sup>170</sup> The *Kōdōkan* was planning a two-day event for the celebration, and the donations were part of an

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<sup>168</sup> Hatta, ‘Mrs Mayer’s Judo Practice’.

<sup>169</sup> Hatta, ‘Mrs Mayer’s Judo Practice’.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Report of money received for the *Kōdōkan* 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary’ *Judo* (*Kōdōkan* Publication) November 1934 p.47, *Kōdōkan* Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].

ever present fundraising initiative.<sup>171</sup> Stevens describes the financial situation at the Kōdōkan at that time as being 'so bad' that many schemes were considered to alleviate the difficulties.<sup>172</sup> The report took the form of a list of over ninety names, categorised by the amount of money given. A group of dan holders from the Hyōgo prefecture, of which Kōbe is a part, had contributed ¥100, the largest amount. There were three names under the ¥30 section, and Sarah's name could be found among ten others in the category for ¥10. Following that, there were sections covering ¥5, ¥3 and ¥1 respectively.<sup>173</sup>

Sarah appears to be the only woman in this list and is certainly the only non-Japanese. Could this generosity as a newcomer and stranger be construed as a westerner brandishing cash in an opulent fashion? Perhaps Sarah was hoping for recognition and 'special' treatment? Was the gesture made simply as a woman wishing to contribute to a society that she believed deserving? There has been no evidence found of her donation in any autobiographical documents, or newspaper accounts, her name is purely listed alongside the others in the report. Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn would appear to be an act of good will.

The analysis of Letter Five has again seen Sarah putting herself in danger, albeit unwittingly, as she experienced one of the worst natural disasters Japan had seen on the journey to Osaka. The fact that she was on the trip at all, as assistant to Ichiro, shows the growing strength of their relationship, and of his acceptance of her as part of the establishment itself, relying on her help to organise a large group of boys from Japan and overseas. But it also indicates how she was only willing to 'muck in' up to a point, and accepted convention with special treatment in the form of an hotel in the devastated city.

Another example of her enthusiasm for adventure, was her choice to continue to train in the men's *dōjō* rather than the women's, despite finding it physically difficult and exhausting. In Kōbe and Kyoto, there had been no option but to train with men, but in Tokyo the *joshi-bu* or women's department, was presumably at her disposal. Kanō's support of her endeavours holds a

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<sup>171</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.126.

<sup>172</sup> Stevens, *The Way of Judo* p.79.

<sup>173</sup> 'Report of Money'.

significance for the history of women in judo, demonstrating his advocacy of women participating on the international stage. The money Sarah donated in honour of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations was a noteworthy gesture but was unlikely to have affected the way she was viewed by the establishment. However, the party was a huge event in the Kōdōkan diary, and Sarah was once again, to find herself part of the show.

#### 4.6 Letter Six, September 1934-November 1934

##### **Letter Six, 501. 4-chome, Setagaya, 27 November 1934**

‘I was so frightened by the instructions I had been given (how to bow and which mat to stand on in a hall of 500 mats each indistinguishable from the next) that I was more inclined to collapse on his bosom than engage him in combat.’

This, the penultimate letter in the collection, mainly devoted to the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Kōdōkan, shows how the gendered complexity of Sarah’s treatment was put to one side for the public display. It also holds testimony of a potentially significant contribution by Sarah to judo in the west.

The letter was written three days after the anniversary event and came almost two months following the previous correspondence. It gives the second piece of evidence that Koizumi responded to Sarah’s other letters, with the simple line, ‘Thank you very much for your letter’ (the first testimony came in Letter Four with ‘I was so pleased to get your letter’) indicating that he was indeed showing an interest in her trip, and the progress she was making. However, it began with the news that Robert had allowed her to extend the length of her trip by six months.

The anniversary celebrations were an important event for the Kōdōkan, and the fact that Sarah was involved in them demonstrates how the establishment was using her for publicity. The event took the form of two days of speeches, displays, award giving and an exhibition.<sup>174</sup> Beginning on 23 November 1934 in

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<sup>174</sup> ‘Kōdōkan 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Establishment’ *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) January 1935 pp.4-14, Kōdōkan Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].

the new building at 1-Banchi, Koishikawa-machi, Tokyo, the event was attended by Prince Kanin-no-miya, his arrival marked by the National Anthem.<sup>175</sup>



23. 'Kōdōkan 50th Anniversary of Establishment' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) January 1935.

Kanō gave a speech, and he spoke to the families of his deceased former teachers as if to the teachers themselves. Next, a speech by Yamashita Yoshitsugu was read by Munakata Itsuro, as Yamashita was advanced in years, and his voice was not strong. Yamashita was one of Kanō's earliest pupils, and one of the first Japanese judo experts to visit America, teaching the President, Theodore Roosevelt whilst he was there in 1904.<sup>176</sup> Yamashita became known as one of the four 'Demi-Gods' of Kōdōkan judo (otherwise known as 'guardians' or 'kings'), and was the first person to receive the award of Kōdōkan *jūdan* or tenth *dan*, awarded posthumously in 1935.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>175</sup> 'Kōdōkan 50th Anniversary of Establishment'.

<sup>176</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, in Joseph Bucklin Bishop (ed), *Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1919) pp.113–114 [online] <http://www.bartleby.com> (accessed July 2018); Wendy Rouse, 'Jiu-Jitsu Uncle Sam The Unmanly Art of Jiu-Jitsu and the Yellow Peril Threat in the Progressive Era United States,' *Pacific Historical Review* 84:4 (October 2015) pp.448-477.

<sup>177</sup> Motohashi Hanako, '講道館柔道十段物語 講道館最初の十段 山下義昭 [The Story of Kōdōkan Judo Tenth Dan (1) Yamashita Yoshitsugu],' *Judo* 80:4 (2009) pp.10-18 [in Japanese]; Inoue, 'Invention of the Martial Arts' p.166.

Yamashita's speech began with a theme reflected in this thesis; the fact that fifty years earlier, Japanese culture was intent on absorbing western influences, and that Japanese traditional activities such as *jūjutsu* were out of fashion.<sup>178</sup> He continued to explain that through determination of vision and ambition, Kanō had reinvented the traditional techniques and exercises related to martial arts as judo, and encouraged a reinvigoration of this semi-traditional cultural force. He stated that there were 80,000 people registered at the Kōdōkan with over 50,000 of them *dan* holders, and that over one million people were practising judo including those outside of the Kōdōkan. Munakata continued on behalf of Yamashita with a tribute to Kanō's energy and dedication, and a rallying cry for the Kōdōkan's further success and development.

The close connections with Kanō and judo to the education strategy for Japan in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and the continuing importance of judo leading into the military era, were in evidence.<sup>179</sup> Telegrams from absent well-wishers were read, including one from the Prime Minister, and Sarah described a 'long oration' by the Minister for Education.<sup>180</sup> There were *kata* displays by men and by women and a female *randori* exhibition. Next there were three mixed couples, consisting of male teachers with their female pupils, who gave *randori* presentations, and the final part of this section presented Sarah fighting against Samura Kaiichiro.<sup>181</sup> She described this as 'comic relief'.<sup>182</sup> As well as her self-deprecation within this part of the letter, Sarah portrayed herself as a resilient and determined character, using her professional skills to perform under pressure, as she had suffered a relatively common, yet excruciating, judo injury.<sup>183</sup>

'I dislocated my shoulder a few weeks ago which stopped me doing any Judo but the bonesetter patched me up in time for the anniversary. As I was about to enter the dojo he begged me to fight with might and main

<sup>178</sup> 'Kōdōkan's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Establishment'; For an overview of Japanese modernity in the period see, Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*.

<sup>179</sup> Committee for the Commemoration, *Kano Jigoro* pp.67-92; Kano, 'The Contribution of Jiudo' pp.37-58.

<sup>180</sup> Letter Six, Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gunji, 27 November 1934, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>181</sup> 'Kōdōkan's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Establishment'.

<sup>182</sup> Letter Six.

<sup>183</sup> Elena Pocecco et al, 'Injuries in Judo: A Systematic Literature Review including Suggestions for Prevention,' *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 47:18 (2013) pp.1139-1143.

adding that if I put my shoulder out again he would soon mend it! As he attends to me for nothing I suppose it was meant very kindly, but I was very glad that nothing of the kind happened.

'I had thought that I should be allowed to practice again the next day, but the bonesetter tells me that I must wait for another week as, although nothing serious happened to my shoulder, the exertion did it no good.'<sup>184</sup>

Pocecco et al. have shown that glenohumeral, or shoulder dislocation in judo, is mostly caused when the player is resisting being thrown by their opponent, and thus falls awkwardly.<sup>185</sup>

The fact that Sarah was not featured as part of the women only section, but was placed in the mixed section, demonstrating with their teachers, even though she was partnered with one of the most important and highly ranked *jūdoka* of the period, shows, perhaps a reluctance to publicly portray her as a completely separate and different case to the other women, despite the fact that she was allowed on a daily basis to be treated as 'other'. Notwithstanding Sarah's physical limitations, the demonstration went well, and she was congratulated afterwards by Kanō himself, who told her that he had been 'interested' and that she had a 'good posture'. Yamashita also introduced himself, and according to Sarah, said that she was 'very skilful'. The following day of festivities involved more speeches, an exhibition of Kanō's archive of written materials, photographs, and his judo suit, which he had stitched and mended himself (most of these items can be found in the current Kōdōkan Museum and Archive), and more demonstrations of *kata* and *randori*.<sup>186</sup>

The subject matter of three of the five talks given on the second day, gives some indication of the importance to Kanō's Kōdōkan of the international reach of judo. Following two speeches on the establishment and early development of the Kōdōkan by another of the four 'Demi-Gods' Tomita Tsunejirō, and Munakata Itsuro, there were talks on 'Judo in Europe and Africa' by Ishiguro Keishichi, 'Judo in India and Afgan' from Takagaki Shinzo, and Nagaoka Hideichi spoke of his experiences in the U.S. and Europe.

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<sup>184</sup> Letter Six.

<sup>185</sup> Pocecco et al, 'Injuries in judo,' p.1141.

<sup>186</sup> 'Kōdōkan's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Establishment'.

Nagaoka was, a few years later, along with Yamashita and Isogai Hajime, to become one of only three *jūdan* men to be awarded the honour within Kanō's lifetime.<sup>187</sup> He was the director of the Kōdōkan, and became one of Sarah's teachers on his return from abroad.<sup>188</sup> The records of the 'United States Border Crossings from Canada' show that Nagaoka had planned to return from his trip to England and America by the end of October.<sup>189</sup> They also indicate that he arrived in New York on 31 August 1934 on the R.M.S. *Berengaria*, a ship which less than two months before had carried Sarah's husband Robert to New York for a trip.<sup>190</sup> Sarah had expressed a distaste for such a luxury liner preferring, she said, 'the small ships' where sometimes she was the only passenger.<sup>191</sup> Thus, Sarah projected the image of an adventuress, with a penchant for attention, and the celebrations at the Kōdōkan had certainly provided Sarah with a little of both.

The afternoon of the final day brought one last speech by Kanō on the significance of the Kōdōkan motto *Jita-Kyoei*, reflecting harmony and co-operation. The concluding item on the agenda, along with the first two speeches of the second day, show how, half a century after the foundation of judo, history was an important aspect of Kanō's education principles, with film footage of tournaments and performances of the old style of *kata* projected to a complicit audience.

This event, along with Sarah's account of it, shows the exceptional nature of her time at the Kōdōkan. If the figures given by Yamashita of 80,000 people affiliated to the Kōdōkan were correct, then it was the crème de la crème of those *jūdōka* who demonstrated as part of the celebrations, although, counting the names listed in the article of those performing, all sixteen women, numbered by Sarah in her earlier article, participated. Of those, three gave mixed *randori*

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<sup>187</sup> Kōdōkan Judo Institute 'Kodokan Hall of Fame' [online]

<http://kodokanjudoinstitut.org/en/doctrine/palace/> (accessed April 2017).

<sup>188</sup> Letter Six.

<sup>189</sup> Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787–2004, Manifests of Alien Arrivals in the Seattle, Washington District: NAI 2953576, Record Group Number 85, Series Number A4107, Roll Number 029, The National Archives, Washington, D.C., [online [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)] (accessed March 2017).

<sup>190</sup> Letter Two; R.M.S. *Berengaria*, New York, Arrival 15 June 1934, New York Passenger Lists [online] [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed June 2018).

<sup>191</sup> Letter Two.

sessions with their teachers. Sarah was not involved in the women only section, but with Samura Kaiichiro, another man who was to become *jūdan*, she was the final 'act' in the mixed group.

Considering the disparity between the numbers of women and men within the Kōdōkan, it is not surprising that all of the women were invited to perform, but it is interesting that a low-ranking foreign woman, who in fact trained amongst the men, was included and showcased. It could be considered that Kanō's wish for the international integration of judo was a relevant factor. Sarah's is the only western name to appear in the programme of demonstrations, therefore it must be assumed that she made a valuable contribution to his vision.

Sarah's relationships with Butokukai men were also strengthening and this was to become vital in her pioneering achievement. Most of the Kōdōkan alumni had travelled to Tokyo for the event, including Isogai from Kyoto, the Professor who had laughed so hard at Sarah's groundwork technique, and Iizuka, with whom she had climbed the mountain at Maebashi. Sarah invited two sixth dan men, whose names she did not specify, for lunch at the Imperial Hotel, to thank them for their kindness to her. They were joined by Isogai and Iizuka.

'We had a very merry party in the course of which Prof. Isogai drank several cocktails and plenty of sake. I will say that for a man who has never tasted a cocktail before he carried it remarkably well. It is true that he offered me a 5th degree if I would go to Kyoto, but otherwise he was quite himself. He broke his leg a short while ago and arrived leaning heavily upon a stick, but he left the hotel waving it in the air. When I remember how terrified I was of him in Kyoto I can't help laughing. As for Prof. Iizuka [sic] - I've never been able to take him very seriously since I taught him the Charleston.'<sup>192</sup>

The Imperial Hotel was a cosmopolitan venue, where wealthier foreigners in Tokyo could congregate for relaxation. The above excerpt from Sarah's letter gives a highly descriptive example of the interaction with these famous judo men which she enjoyed. It details a relaxed and comfortable relationship, despite the cultural and language barriers. It also indicates where and how her

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<sup>192</sup> Letter Six.



achievement of *dan* grade might become manifest, although the promise of a fifth degree, or *dan*, would have stretched even Sarah's expectations.

Her developing relationship with Nagaoka was a little different. He was perhaps more used to the concept of feminine judo, as Bennett shows, he had been one of the teachers of women earlier in the century.<sup>193</sup>



24. Image of Nagaoka Hideichi, Kōdōkan Judo Institute [online] [www.kodokanjudoinstitutione.org](http://www.kodokanjudoinstitutione.org)

It would also appear that whilst he was in London, he had spent time at the Budokwai. Sarah asked Koizumi if he had requested that Nagaoka 'look after' her:

'if he sees me alone in the Kodokan he calls loudly and demands to know the reason that I am being neglected. The other men who are quite accustomed to me look very surprised and rather at a loss.'<sup>194</sup>

Sarah also noted the difference between the way she was treated by him and the other 'Great Men':

'[They] either slap me heartily on the back or cuff me as if I were a small boy and they are all very kind, but Mr. Nagaoka seems to think that I shall perish if not constantly watched. He seems very kind and is very upset about my shoulder, which the others seem to think a good joke.'<sup>195</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.132.

<sup>194</sup> Letter Six.

<sup>195</sup> Letter Six.

This shows very clearly that she was keen to communicate to Koizumi, the relaxed atmosphere between herself and the judo establishment. It also perhaps gives another possibility for the reasons for their seemingly universal unusual behaviour towards her. If, to her mind, they were treating this thirty-eight-year-old, blonde, attractive woman like 'a small boy', it engenders the difference between their conduct towards Japanese women in the same environment, and the fact that she was not thought of in the feminine sense but as something 'other'. However, she did not act in what Japanese men would perceive as a feminine manner, therefore, distinguishing her from local women, not only in terms of appearance, but also in agency. Clearly this conduct would also influence the differentiation. Perhaps she was acting and authoring her own narrative away from convention?

Whatever the sense of her gender, her treatment, particularly by the Hatta family, could be considered hospitable and generous in the extreme. Much had happened within the four months or so that Sarah had been staying with them, and since Robert had given her permission to stay a further six months, Ichiro had vacated his room for Sarah's use. The upheaval for the family must have been inconvenient, but it seems there was never a question of her moving out to an hotel, or at least, there was no mention of it in her letters, and the Hattas continued with their hospitality, treating her as if a member of the family. For Sarah, this must have been pleasant, convenient, and perhaps cheap. What Sarah was contributing in return is difficult to ascertain, however it could be construed that there was a certain prestige associated with their connection to a foreign 'modern' woman in relation to the national drive for tourism.<sup>196</sup> Haarmann describes 'the use of foreign languages as symbols of prestige in Japan' while Leheny reveals the wish by the head of the Japan Tourist Board, Takahisa Jinnosuke, in 1936, for 'foreign customers [to] be exposed to the courteous hospitality for which Japan should be known.'<sup>197</sup>

We should also consider whether Sarah was a valuable asset for Ichiro's ambition. She was useful to him through her connections in London, and

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<sup>196</sup> Nakagawa 'Prewar Tourism' pp.22–27.

<sup>197</sup> Harald Haarmann, *Language in Ethnicity: A View of Basic Ecological Relations* (Berlin, New York and Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter 1986) p.209; David Leheny, *The Rules of Play: National Identity and the Shaping of Japanese Leisure* (Cornell: Cornell University Press 2003) p.67.

through her knowledge of the English language. In her letter she told Koizumi that Ichiro was keen to write a judo book in English and was using Sarah as a secretary and translator.

'I am afraid all the work will fall on me although we are supposed to be collaborating. His idea seems to be that I shall do the writing and he shall do the reading and it is like getting blood out of a stone to get him to do the necessary translating for me.'<sup>198</sup>

This is highly significant, in that there was a book written by Ichiro, published in 1940, called *Judo*.<sup>199</sup> It is entirely possible that part of that book was produced by Sarah, and that the English terms may have originally been coined by her. Having asked Koizumi for examples of English terms for the techniques already in existence, she concluded that for the new techniques being invented by such luminaries as Mifune, 'I shall have to try to think out suitable terms myself.' What legacy to judo this book has left is unknown. The book is now rare, and there are no copies held in the British Library, or indeed, from a search on World Cat in July 2018, there were none shown in any libraries across the UK, and worldwide only one copy was to be found, held in the LA84 collection in California, U.S.

The comments made by Sarah about 'new tricks' being invented by 'Mifune and others' also reveal that the 1930s were an interesting and dynamic time for the evolution of judo. This exhibits the juxtaposition between the image and actuality of judo in western minds. Far from being a staid and traditional historic sport, preserved in time, it was a modern and developing form, and part of that development was growth through international relations.<sup>200</sup>

Ichiro's own international ambitions were again mentioned by Sarah to Koizumi. She repeated his intention to travel to England with her, if his father were to allow it. This time she said that she could 'manage his fares' and pay him some 'pocket money' if the Budokwai could cover his 'board and lodging'.<sup>201</sup> She added that it would be 'an excellent thing for the club' if Ichiro were to spend a

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<sup>198</sup> Letter Six.

<sup>199</sup> Itiro Hatta, *Judo* (Tokyo: Meguro Shoten 1940).

<sup>200</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* pp.169-174.

<sup>201</sup> Letter Six.

year there. It is unknown whether Koizumi considered that Sarah's opinion on what would be beneficial to the Budokwai was useful, nevertheless, the opinion was proffered.

It would be feasible to consider that Sarah's confidence in terms of judo was growing through this period, as her relationships strengthened with both the Butokukai, through Isogai and Iizuka, and the Kōdōkan through Mifune and Nagaoka. As the only Western participant at the largest and most prestigious event held by the organization to that date, Sarah continued to be used as a role model by the Kōdōkan, and she showed a strength of body and character, performing with a serious injury. Perhaps this aspect stemmed from her former career, and the old adage that the show must go on.

One of the most interesting aspects of this sixth letter, however, is Sarah's contribution to the English language book being devised by Ichiro. Initially, it shows his international ambition, but also, the fact that he allowed her to translate, and name some of the techniques for the western world, demonstrates his confidence in her abilities. In addition, the fact that Sarah was sharing his home, indeed had taken over his bedroom, must go some way to explaining his trust in her skills, and their friendship was set to strengthen further over the coming months in the face of more natural disasters.

#### 4.7 Letter Seven, November 1934-January 1935

##### **Letter Seven, 501. 4-chome, Setagaya, 9 January 1935**

'I'm covered with bruises and I've got a black eye that would not disgrace a Billingsgate fish-fag!'

This, the final letter in the collection, written in January 1935, does not include the finale to Sarah's journey, nor the highlight of her judo fame - the award of *shōdan*. That event occurred two months later. However, this letter does continue to provide evidence of her commitment to judo training, and the unusual nature of her visit, regarding both women and westerners at the Kōdōkan, and in conjunction with Japanese newspaper clippings found with the letters from a similar date, a picture can be drawn of the final months of Sarah's ground-breaking trip.

As with Letter Five, sent in September of the previous year, this despatch begins again with drama. Not a typhoon this time but earthquakes. Lying at the convergence of four tectonic plates, Japan has a high propensity to seismic activity.<sup>202</sup> According to Sarah, during the first four days of January, there were small shocks, owing to activity at Hakone, in the mountainous region southwest of Tokyo, overlooked by Mount Fuji. This is confirmed through a contemporary document from the SAO/NASA Astrophysics Data System.<sup>203</sup> Sarah was concerned about the prospect of a large earthquake.

'It takes years off my life when we all have to leap up in the night and fly to the door ready to take to our heels before the house falls down. Neither do the frequent warnings, instructions and advice that the Hatta family give me as to the best way to escape if the worst comes to the worst do anything to reassure me, but merely add to my fears'.<sup>204</sup>

The Great Kanto Earthquake which had destroyed the majority of Tokyo's buildings, and completely shattered the city infrastructure in 1923, was fresh in the memories of the local population.<sup>205</sup> The Hatta family were not being excessively cautious as there was genuine potential danger.

Local earthquakes were not the only hazards faced by Sarah in January 1935. She and Ichiro attended the *kan-geiko* or winter training sessions held at the Kōdōkan. One of Kanō's objectives for judo was to produce extremely fit players who were prepared to fight in all conditions, thereby he devised the *kan-geiko* and *shochū-geiko* (summer training) programmes.<sup>206</sup> The idea was that *jūdōka* practiced at full exertion whether the temperatures were extremely low, or conversely, high, thus strengthening both the body and resolve. To add to the difficulty, sessions began at five o'clock in the morning, and Sarah and Ichiro brewed coffee the evening before, keeping it in a thermos flask for the early

<sup>202</sup> P. Karan Pradyumna, *Japan in the 21st Century: Environment, Economy, and Society* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky 2005) p.11.

<sup>203</sup> H. Tanakadate, 'Volcanic Activity in Japan during the Period between July 1934 and October 1935,' *Japanese Journal of Astronomy and Geophysics* 13 (1935) p.129 [online] <http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/full/1935JaJAG..13..121T/0000121.000.html> (accessed April 2017).

<sup>204</sup> Letter Seven, Sarah Mayer to Koizumi Gunji, 9 January 1935, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>205</sup> For English language overviews of The Great Kanto Earthquake see, J. Charles Schencking, *The Great Kanto Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press 2013); Alex Bates, *The Culture of the Quake: The Great Kanto Earthquake and Taisho Japan* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan Press 2015).

<sup>206</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* pp.93-95.

start. The sessions began on 5 January and attendance was considered essential for all serious *jūdōka*. 'There are six hundred men attending the winter exercises and, as I am the only female allowed in the men's dojo, there are no women there.'<sup>207</sup>

The Kōdōkan's *Judo* magazine issued in February 1935 held a significant set of photographs of the *kan-geiko* sessions.<sup>208</sup>



25. 'Kan-Geiko' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) February 1935.

On the first page there was a montage of three images. The top picture showed over a hundred men in white judogi, kneeling in front of five masters wearing black, and, presumably, Kanō who knelt on a dais. This image was described as the Master and his trainees. It is not possible to clearly make out a blonde head amongst the Japanese men, but the photograph appears to cut off some of those present. In a second photograph of the women's section, there are nine women and two male teachers, and finally a full-length image of Sarah and Samura, the man she partnered at the fiftieth anniversary celebrations a few months before, in what appears to be a *randori* session. There are other fighters in the background whose apparel is in disarray, and it describes her as mixing in with the men. Sarah is attempting to throw Samura, but it does not seem to be a committed effort and is likely to be posed. That year saw the first ever *kan-geiko* for the women's division, beginning on 13 January, eight days after the

<sup>207</sup> Letter Seven.

<sup>208</sup> 'Kan-Geiko' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) February 1935 p.1, Kōdōkan Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].

male counterpart.<sup>209</sup> Perhaps Sarah's ability to endure the harsh conditions of the men's sessions encouraged the initiative, although it would seem a little late to make that decision, so it is likely to be a coincidence.

In the rough environment, on the *tatami* of the male *dōjō*, with so many men attempting to throw each other in such close proximity, Sarah became bruised and battered. A Japanese newspaper article sent with her letter to Koizumi had a photograph from the winter sessions of Sarah practising with Mifune.<sup>210</sup>



26. 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*' unnamed and undated newspaper clipping, reproduced by kind permission of The Richard Bowen Collection.

Interestingly, this seems not to have been a set up photograph, as, in her letter, Sarah described the difficulty that the photographer experienced in making his way through the tangle of bodies. Mifune was a well-known character, and the chance for a photograph of him fighting the only westerner in the room, let alone a 'blonde' woman, would likely have been a coup for the camera man.

Unlike the article in *Kōdōkan's Judo* magazine of October 1934 and the newspaper articles referred to by Sarah in Letter Four, she does not refute the validity of the text in this piece. The article is titled 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*' and the

<sup>209</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.136.

<sup>210</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*' Unnamed and Undated Newspaper Clipping [in Japanese] held with Letters from Sarah Mayer to Gunji Koizumi February 1934-January 1935 C.64, R.B.C.

interest in the colour of Sarah's hair continues throughout the piece. The translation of the first line reads 'This blonde beauty is called Sarah Mayer who is the wife of an ex-English army officer, now a rich London lawyer.'<sup>211</sup>

The areas of concern from this remark are twofold. The attention drawn to Robert's profession and his perceived wealth speak to a key aspect of this work. Firstly, the fact that his profession is considered to be of interest to the readers of the newspaper, in an article very much about Sarah, and with Robert not even present in the country, gives an insight into the patriarchal aspect of Japanese society, and its similarities with Britain at that period. Coutts explains how the Meiji Civil Code gave women few rights and denied them 'autonomy from the patriarchal family structure'.<sup>212</sup> According to Lebra, very little changed for women during the Meiji period: 'The Meiji Civil Code delineated women as basically "good wife and wise mother" and subordinated her legally to man.'<sup>213</sup> Conversely, more recently Patessio has shown the development of women as public agents through this era.<sup>214</sup> Likewise, Mackie describes 'the depiction of the patriarchal family form [in Japan]' as 'a convenient myth which has persisted to the present day.'<sup>215</sup> The evidence here shows, however, that a husband's profession, however, was of the utmost importance to determine the social positioning of any woman, but particularly a western woman, from whom there were few other clues. Secondly, the fact that attention was blatantly drawn to Robert's wealth, reveals the strata in which Sarah was being placed within the societal structure of Japan. It could be considered that were she not from an apparently wealthy background, her treatment therein may have been different. It is known that Japanese women of a higher status were participating in judo, and Sarah's supposed position in British society might have appealed to Japanese class consciousness.

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<sup>211</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'.

<sup>212</sup> Angela Coutts, 'Imagining Radical Women in Interwar Japan: Leftist and Feminist Perspectives,' *Signs* 37:2 (2012) p.326.

<sup>213</sup> Joyce Lebra, Joy Paulson and Elizabeth Powers (eds), *Women in Changing Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1976) p.109.

<sup>214</sup> Mara Patessio, 'The Creation of Public Spaces by Women in the Early Meiji Period and the Tokyo Fujin Kyofukai,' *International Journal of Asian Studies* 2 (2006) pp.155-182.

<sup>215</sup> Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour, and Activism 1900-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997) p.34.



The article went into some detail about Sarah's trip, but it began with the fact that she had started to practise judo in London ten years previously with Koizumi and Tani, stating that both had reached fourth *dan*. It continued with the fact that she has been staying in Setagaya with Ichiro and named the three *dōjō* she had been attending. The article also revealed how she had extended her original six month stay, and that she had been attending *kan-geiko* from five o'clock in the morning.<sup>216</sup>

The piece then referred to her 'elegant movement and young-girl-like appearance', despite the bruising on her eye 'telling a story of her hard practice'.<sup>217</sup> Noting that she only practised with women in Britain, and that she was 'not interested' in doing so in Japan, the article stated that she trained with male high ranking *jūdoka*. As Sarah did not contradict this in her letter to Koizumi, although this could have been due to her lack of Japanese language skills and understanding of the article's content, it gives further indication of the separation of women and men at the Budokwai, and the lack of a precedent for Sarah to be practicing within a male environment.

The article continued with a description of the training session between Sarah and Mifune, outlining throws attempted, and stating that, 'as she has made such progress, she could be awarded *shōdan* soon'.<sup>218</sup> This is the first mention of the word *shōdan*, or first degree black belt, in relation to Sarah which has emerged through this research, and it is not clear whether anyone other than the reporter had proffered the suggestion.

To finish, there was a quotation from Sarah, again unrefuted by her. The translation begins, 'I was in poor health before, but thanks to judo I have gained my health and strength'.<sup>219</sup> This too, is the first mention of Sarah having ill health before her trip. As well as a lack of further evidence to confirm this statement, it has an interesting similarity to the story of Noriko Yasuda from the first decade of the twentieth century, whereby she was a sickly woman before her time with Kanō practising judo, and but rose to strength beyond that of her

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<sup>216</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'.

<sup>217</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'.

<sup>218</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'.

<sup>219</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'.

contemporaries due to her training regime.<sup>220</sup> The inclusion of Sarah's quotation was likely to be part of the drive to encourage more women's participation in the activity, and she could have been encouraged, by the senior men at the Kōdōkan, to say that doing judo had improved her health. Otherwise, it could be true. Although not admitting to having been ill, as early as Letter Three, whilst still in Kōbe, Sarah said 'I am feeling better than I ever felt in my life. Woes are a thing of the past and I am aggressively healthy.'<sup>221</sup>

The final part of Sarah's quotation began with an assertion that another of her hobbies was riding. Photographs held by the Mayer family confirm that Sarah rode, and that horses were kept at Quarr House. It would appear from the photographs that she was a proficient rider, and this could perhaps contribute to research by authors such as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Adrian Bingham and Clare Langhamer, regarding the choices and combinations of leisure activities carried out by British women in the inter-war period, and the skill standards which they obtained.<sup>222</sup>

Sarah told the reporter that she intended to 'build a *dōjō* at home in England' on her return, a fact which was corroborated within her letter, when she asked if Koizumi wanted her to bring anything back with her for the Budokwai, but added 'Don't ask for mats because I am taking some back with me to fix up a practice room at Quarr'.<sup>223</sup> This shows that Sarah had a real commitment to judo and was not just enjoying the attention she was receiving in Japan, although that was clearly a welcome by-product of her enthusiasm. It is possible that the intention to take mats back to England was Ichiro's idea, to ensure the availability of good quality Japanese *tatami* for his use in England. This, however, is unlikely. He was probably not intending to practise in Hampshire very often, as there would be no skilled opponents with whom to train, added to the fact that his policy in general, was to make things as difficult as possible in training, and to pursue excellence in the face of adversity, thereby having an

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<sup>220</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.132.

<sup>221</sup> Letter Three.

<sup>222</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain,' *Women's History Review* 20:2 (2011) pp.299-317; Adrian Bingham, "'An Era of Domesticity'? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain,' *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004) pp.225-233; Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000) pp.1-15.

<sup>223</sup> Letter Seven.

advantage over others.<sup>224</sup> Abe states that his toughening techniques have since become known as Hatta-isms.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, Sarah's dedication would seem the most likely reason for the plan to take mats back to England.

The strategy for Ichiro's visit to England was also taking shape. Sarah told Koizumi that he was planning to take three boys with him,

'They are going to wrestle in Berlin in preparation for the Olympic Games next year and will stay in Europe for a month. Ichiro of course wants to stay much longer and hopes to be able to remain for a year and return with the Olympic team in 1936.'<sup>226</sup>

This is, in fact, almost exactly what happened, and was verified using the passenger lists held at The National Archives.<sup>227</sup> He actually travelled with four students, and gave 'c/o G. Koizumi, 83 Ebury Street, London', as the proposed address on arrival, for him and the four boys. This was part of Ichiro's ambition for Japanese wrestling; having competed in the 1932 Games, he was the team coach in 1936.

It would appear from the address detail that Koizumi had agreed to help Ichiro with board and lodging when he arrived in England. Sarah repeated that she would pay his fares and give him pocket money, asking Koizumi to 'dole it out' to him in segments, or he would 'give it all away'.<sup>228</sup> She also made sure to remind Koizumi that it would be better if Robert did not know about the arrangement as 'he will think I am too rich, which would never do'.<sup>229</sup> Considering that it would be Robert's money that she was contributing to Ichiro and his Japanese wrestling ambitions, it is interesting that she did not consider it necessary to inform him of its use. Perhaps she was aware that he did not share her enthusiasm for Ichiro or judo, in fact, it is not known whether Robert knew of her living arrangements with the Hatta family, or whether he had any

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<sup>224</sup> Trevor P. Leggett, 'Mr. Ichiro Hatta's Training Methods,' *Judo Quarterly Bulletin*, October 1952, pp. 6-7; Stevens, *The Way of Judo* p.107.

<sup>225</sup> Ikuo Abe, "'It was October 1964, when I met the Demon for the First Time": Supo-kon Manga as Lieux de Mémoire,' *Sport in Society* 14:4 (2011) pp.518-531.

<sup>226</sup> Letter Seven.

<sup>227</sup> 'Hakone Maru' London, Arrival 30 June 1935, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed December 2017).

<sup>228</sup> Letter Seven.

<sup>229</sup> Letter Seven.

interest in her judo ambitions. But it is clear that her drive and determination to achieve a higher degree of skill and mental awareness through judo was building, and the talk of *shōdan* was to augur the final phase of Sarah's trip.

#### 4.8 Shōdan and Beyond, January 1935-April 1935

'this does not mean the end. I shall continue to master the art of judo'

This final section of this chapter details the most significant aspect of this thesis, Sarah's black-belt achievement. It attempts to show how, and perhaps why the award came about. As there has been no letter found covering this part of Sarah's trip, contemporary international newspaper reports, along with extracts from Kōdōkan's *Judo* magazine, must be relied upon for the scant evidence describing the details. It is here too, through these resources, that we consider this global press interest in Sarah's accomplishment and its significance within the complex political issues of the time.

Sarah had left Britain with a Budokwai grade of fourth *kyū*. In the April 1935 edition of *Judo*, she was noted as having received an *ikkyū* or first *kyū*, the grade before *shōdan*, as part of the women's section of the Kōdōkan.<sup>230</sup> This was due to 'the improvement she has made and her dedication', and the article drew attention to the fact that she had been attending *kan-geiko* with the men.<sup>231</sup> There were eight other women listed with their grades, one of whom, Noritomi, was the first woman to achieve *nidan* or second *dan*, having 'skipped' *shōdan*. Two others, Morioka and Akutagawa were awarded *shōdan*, three including Sarah were given *ikkyū*, with three others combined at *nikyū* (second) and *sankyū* (third).<sup>232</sup> Women's *dan* grades at the Kōdōkan differed from the men's, and they wore a black belt with a white stripe along the centre indicating the difference.<sup>233</sup>

In February or March 1935, Sarah took another trip to Kyoto, visiting the Butokukai and Professor Isogai; a man she may have considered a close acquaintance after their lunch together, where, in the party atmosphere, he

<sup>230</sup> 'Mrs Mayer is Ikkyū not Shōdan,' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) April 1935 p.40, Kōdōkan Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].

<sup>231</sup> 'Mrs Mayer is Ikkyū.

<sup>232</sup> 'Mrs Mayer is Ikkyū; Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* pp.136-137.

<sup>233</sup> Noriko Mizoguchi, *性と柔: 女子柔道史から問う* [*Gender and Gentleness: A History of Women's Judo*] (Tokyo: 河出書房新社, 2013) p.134 [in Japanese].

jokingly offered her a fifth *dan* if she returned to Kyoto. There she was given another grading and was awarded *shōdan*.<sup>234</sup>



27. Photograph of Butokuden, Kyoto. Author's own collection.

Most of the information on this award comes through international newspaper reports, and although this can be a problematic source if used alone, there does seem to be a general consensus. A report found to carry the dates of the grading comes from the *Perth Daily News*, in Western Australia, which gave a comprehensive article, saying that the information had come from *Trans-Pacific* 'Tokio'.<sup>235</sup> This article, as with most others found relating to this grading, even those in British newspapers, described Sarah as 'the wife of an English Army Officer'. Most had very similar text, some carrying more information than others, but it could be assumed that all gleaned their material from the same source – probably *Trans-Pacific*.<sup>236</sup>

According to the Perth article, the grading took place over four days from 3-6 March. This is corroborated by a piece in *The Japan Times and Mail* of 10 March 1935.<sup>237</sup> *The Japan Times* is an English language newspaper published in Tokyo, and the piece on Sarah stated that she received her *shōdan* on 'Wednesday' from the Butokukai in Kyoto. The date of 6 March 1935 given in the Perth article was indeed a Wednesday. However, *The Salem News*, published in Ohio, USA, on 8 February 1935 carried an article with a

<sup>234</sup> 'Woman Wins Judo Title' *Daily News (Perth)* 21 May 1935 p.8.

<sup>235</sup> 'Woman Wins Judo Title' p.8.

<sup>236</sup> 'First Woman Wins Judo Championship' *Trans-Pacific* 14 March 1935 p.18.

<sup>237</sup> 'Foreign Woman Wins Judo Rank' *Japan Times* 10 March 1935 p.5.

photograph of Sarah in *judogi* fighting a man who looked like Samura Kaichiro. The title was 'She's Woman Jujitsu Champ' and the text under the photograph read 'The only woman with the rank of jujitsu master is the distinction of Sarah Meyer [sic] of London'.<sup>238</sup> This would imply that the grading for shōdan took place earlier, perhaps in early February, although this article does not specify that she was awarded a black belt, only that she was a 'master' and could be referring to the Kōdōkan promotion.

The Perth article continued with information that she was tested on her skills covering fifty movements, which were split into three sections. The first was *kime-no-kata* 極の形, a group of twenty different techniques, both armed and unarmed, put together by Kanō for the establishment of *kata* for the Butokukai in 1906, and which have since continued as Kōdōkan *kata*.<sup>239</sup> Then followed fifteen throwing techniques called *nage-no-kata* 投の形 and fifteen movements of *katame-no-kata* 固の形 which included methods of pinning the opponent to the ground, strangling techniques, and locking joints.<sup>240</sup> The fact that Sarah's grading was considered newsworthy across the world, covering at least four continents, shows perhaps that it was a highly unusual occurrence, and that women's international achievements in whatever their chosen field, were being lauded and accepted.<sup>241</sup>

The *Trans-Pacific* and Perth articles stressed that Sarah,

'did not win the certificate and black belt just because she happened to be a foreign visitor with an enthusiasm for the classic defensive art.

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<sup>238</sup> 'She's Woman Jujitsu Champ' *Salem News* 8 February 1935 p.9.

<sup>239</sup> Kodokan Judo Institute, *Kodokan KATA Textbook* [English translated version: Official translation of the Japanese original] (Tokyo: Kodokan Judo Institute 2014) p.1.

<sup>240</sup> 'Woman Wins Judo Title' p.8; Kodokan Judo Institute, *Kime-No-Kata, Kodokan KATA Textbook* [English translated version: Official translation of the Japanese original] (Tokyo: Kodokan Judo Institute 2014) p.1; Kodokan Judo Institute, *Nage-No-Kata, Kodokan KATA Textbook* [English translated version: Official translation of the Japanese original] (Tokyo: Kodokan Judo Institute 2014) p.1; Kodokan Judo Institute, *Katame-No-Kata, Kodokan KATA Textbook* [English translated version: Official translation of the Japanese original] (Tokyo: Kodokan Judo Institute 2014) p.1.

<sup>241</sup> 'Wrestling Match Between Japanese Cabinet Minister and English Woman' *New Zealand Herald* 18 July 1935 p.10; 'Foreign Woman Wins Judo Rank' p.5; 'Une Femme Arbitre Du Jiu-Jitsu' *Le Figaro* 8 May 1935 p.8; 'Gripping Cabinet Meeting in Tokio' *El Paso Herald Post* 3 May 1935 p.16.

‘She earned them by disciplined effort – by ten months of almost daily practice to master the technique, the principles and the intricate art of judo.’<sup>242</sup>

Even at the time of her award, the reasons for such an unprecedented achievement were being questioned, and the fact that it could have been because she was a foreign visitor was dismissed. The grading was examined by a ‘committee of high-ranking champions’, presided over by Isogai, who was described as holding ‘the ninth rank and the first ranking national champion of the Butokukai, one of the two principle national judo academies, the other being the Kodokan in Tokio’.<sup>243</sup>

The Australian article ran no photographs but held evidence of Sarah’s reaction to her dan grade.

“‘I am extremely happy to have won the award ... I think it was really worth striving for, and I am proud of it. But this does not mean the end. I shall continue to master the art of judo, for even as a champion, I have only won the first rank, I must climb higher.’”<sup>244</sup>

This further demonstrates that Sarah was sincere in her determination. It was the pursuit of bettering her abilities which she claimed was driving her ambition. It also shows her awareness of the fact that *shōdan* was the beginning of the journey to expertise and not the end.

British reports of her achievement were much briefer, also holding no photographs, but seemingly from the same source. The piece in *The Yorkshire Evening Post* was a little longer than most of the other British articles, and almost a carbon copy of the Australian article.<sup>245</sup> Interestingly, it could be this particular newspaper which holds the clue to the brevity of the British response, as, next to Sarah’s piece, there was a column on *Fascists and Freedom*, denouncing Moseley’s Fascist Party, and commenting on other World Powers

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<sup>242</sup> ‘First Woman Wins Judo Championship’ p.18; ‘Woman Wins Judo Title’ p.8.

<sup>243</sup> ‘Woman Wins Judo Title’ p.8.

<sup>244</sup> ‘Woman Wins Judo Title’ p.8.

<sup>245</sup> ‘English Woman Ju-Jitsu Champion’ *Yorkshire Evening Post* 10 April 1935 p.8; ‘Unprecedented Honour’ *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* 10 April 1935 p.11; ‘Jiu-Jitsu Champion’ *Nottingham Evening Post* 10 April 1935 p.1; ‘Champion at Ju-Jitsu’ *Portsmouth Evening News* 10 April 1935 p.9.

with fascism in control.<sup>246</sup> In *The Nottingham Evening Post*, again on the same page as Sarah's news, there was a notice regarding the wedding of the Prussian Prime Minister General Goering which gave more information about the beheading of two men in a Nazi revenge killing than the nuptials.<sup>247</sup>

Sarah's connection with Japan, and the increasingly fascist military leadership, may account for the generally lower profile in Britain, as there was resistance to fascism in wider society, although, the fact that Sarah did make the news is indicative of the unusual nature of her achievement.<sup>248</sup> All the British articles defined Sarah's sport as *jūjutsu*, spelled variously as *ju-jutsu*, *ju-jitsu*, or *jiu-jitsu*, but never Judo. The British reports appeared on 10 April 1935, just over a month after Sarah's award took place, and the Australian article was published towards the end of May. In New Zealand, the story about Sarah was not published until July, but was accompanied by a photograph.



28. 'Wrestling Match between Japanese Cabinet Minister and Englishwoman' *New Zealand Herald* 18 July 1935.

<sup>246</sup> 'Fascists and Freedom' *Yorkshire Evening Post* 10 April 1935 p.8.

<sup>247</sup> 'Nazis Avenge a "Hero"' *Nottingham Evening Post* 10 April 1935 p.1

<sup>248</sup> Janet Dack, "'It Certainly Isn't Cricket': Media Responses to Mosely and the BUF,' in Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (eds), *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2010) pp.140-161.



The image was of Sarah, seated on the mat, being strangled from behind by Shinya Uchida, the Minister for Railways, with Mifune looking on.<sup>249</sup>

This photograph holds huge significance for this thesis. It confirms the interest in using Sarah for political propaganda, as well as for Kanō's aims for the international expansion of judo. Weisenfeld states, 'In the 1930s ... modernist pictorial strategies began to be deployed concurrently in the dynamic realms of national publicity and propaganda (*kokka senden* or *kokusaku senden*) production'.<sup>250</sup> The photograph also illustrates the crossover between the judo and governmental establishment within Japan. It is conceivable that the photograph was taken during a chance encounter between Sarah and Uchida at the Kōdōkan, when a press photographer happened to be present, but this is unlikely. The posed nature of the shot, with the presence of Mifune, seemingly taking an interest, would also appear to counter that theory.

The choice of the particular governmental official shown practising with Sarah, is also significant, and points to the reasons for the use of Sarah for international publicity. As Minister for Railways, Uchida's role also covered responsibility for tourism in Japan.<sup>251</sup> The ministry was involved in the enterprise for the development of Japan within an international context.<sup>252</sup> As we have seen, the progression of Japan's place on the world stage contributed to the financial security of the country, with foreign currency and investment, and the perceived confidence of Japan amongst other world powers.<sup>253</sup>

The choice of pose for the photograph is also interesting. The strangle hold placed Sarah in a vulnerable position. Uchida was the dominant player, and the action was at the point of submission from Sarah, which in judo terms is an outright win for Uchida. It could be considered that the pose in the photograph, of Japan strangling Britain, was a convenient metaphor for the perceived

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<sup>249</sup> 'Wrestling Match' p.10; James W. Morley (ed) and David A. Titus (trans), *Japan's Road to the Pacific War: The Final Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press 1994) pp.228 and 395.

<sup>250</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, 'Publicity and Propaganda in 1930s Japan: Modernism as Method,' *Design Issues* 25:4 (2009) pp.13-28.

<sup>251</sup> Nakagawa 'Prewar Tourism' pp.22-27; Carolin Funck and Malcolm Cooper, *Japanese Tourism: Spaces, Places and Structures* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn 2013) p.35.

<sup>252</sup> Nakagawa 'Prewar Tourism' p.25.

<sup>253</sup> Nakagawa 'Prewar Tourism' p.23; Shizume 'The Japanese Economy'.

relationship between the two powers over the Manchurian affair.<sup>254</sup> In another column next to the image, the New Zealand newspaper held a piece on the general 'ineffectiveness' of The League of Nations, citing 'Japanese action in Manchuria' as an example where the will of The League had been 'flouted'. It included this within a list containing 'the Italian attack on Greek Islands ... the German breaches of the Treaty of Versailles [and] the threatened war between Italy and Abyssinia'.<sup>255</sup>

Japan's separation from The League of Nations in 1933, culminated with its effective resignation in 1935. Relations with other world powers were strained at best. Citing Katō, Burkman notes that conventional opinion shows Japan as an increasingly militarised country, seeking to expand its Empire out of line with global trends.<sup>256</sup> However, he argues that, having seen examples throughout the 1920s, Japan saw itself as 'an adherent of the "respectable imperialism" that avoided challenging the special interests of other powers.'<sup>257</sup>

Another reason the photograph is so important for this work is due to its global coverage. Not only was it used in New Zealand, but also in France in *Le Figaro*,<sup>258</sup> and more than thirteen newspapers, covering ten states in America, used the image between 29 April and 6 May 1935 including *Time* magazine.<sup>259</sup> The article in *Time* was more focussed on Uchida than Sarah, with the title 'Foreign News: Jujitsuing Rail-Man' and spoke directly of Uchida's ideas for promoting tourism in Japan.<sup>260</sup> It did not mention Sarah's *shōdan*, but said that she was 'blonde' and gave her husband's occupation as 'English Army Officer'. Another difference from the previously mentioned articles, and a similarity with

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<sup>254</sup> For an overview on the situation between Japan and Manchuria see, Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1999); Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-33* (London and New York: Routledge 2002); Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932* (Harvard: Harvard University Press 2003).

<sup>255</sup> 'To Avert War' *The New Zealand Herald* 18 July 1935 p.10.

<sup>256</sup> Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations* p.xi; Shūichi Katō, 'Taishō Democracy as the Pre-stage for Japanese Militarism,' in Bernard S. Silberman and H. D. Harootunian, (eds), *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1974) pp.218 and 283.

<sup>257</sup> Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations* p.xii.

<sup>258</sup> 'Une Femme Arbitre Du Jiu-Jitsu' *Le Figaro* 8 May 1935 p.8.

<sup>259</sup> A search of American newspapers through [www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com) produced, for example; *Lowell Sun* 30 April 1935; *Port Arthur News* 1 May 1935; *El Paso Herald Post* 3 May 1935 (accessed April 2017); 'Foreign News: Jujitsuing Railman' *Time* 29 April 1935.

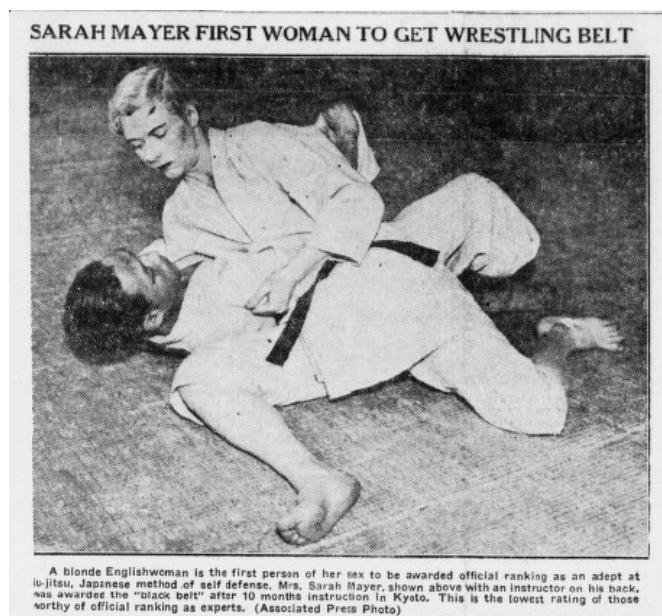
<sup>260</sup> 'Foreign News: Jujitsuing Railman'.

the *Le Figaro* piece, is that the stated reason for the meeting between the two *jūdōka* was for a match.

‘According to the Japanese Government Railways, the jujitsu match was for the best two falls out of three... After that "they feinted and tossed and writhed and grunted for a full half hour" on the matting until Minister Uchida thoroughly subdued Mrs. Mayer and won the match.’<sup>261</sup>

Rather amusingly, Uchida was then quoted as saying, “She is the most adept Englishwoman at jujitsu I have ever met.”<sup>262</sup> How many female English *jūdōka* he had come across is not mentioned.

*The Stanford Daily*, a journal produced by students at Stanford University, ran a piece on Sarah on 2 April 1935 using a different photograph, this time of Sarah holding down her opponent, which was attributed to ‘Associated Press’.<sup>263</sup> It did not name the other player but said, (incorrectly) that she was the ‘first person of her sex to be awarded official ranking as an adept at Ju Jitsu.’ Again, like the Japanese and other American papers, *The Stanford Daily* used the term ‘blonde Englishwoman’, but this time did not refer to her husband or his occupation.



29. ‘Sarah Mayer First Woman to get Wrestling Belt’ *Stanford Daily* 2 April 1935.

<sup>261</sup> ‘Foreign News: Jujitsuing Railman’.

<sup>262</sup> ‘Foreign News: Jujitsuing Railman’.

<sup>263</sup> ‘Sarah Mayer First Woman to get Wrestling Belt’ *Stanford Daily* 2 April 1935 p.3.

This same photograph of Sarah holding down her opponent can also be found through IMAGNO, the Austrian historical image archive, with anonymity attributed to the photographer, but with the text, in English, saying 'The Englishwoman Sarah Meyer [sic] at Kodokan – the jujutsu training center in Tokyo. 9<sup>th</sup> April 1935'.<sup>264</sup>

It is interesting to juxtapose the global reactions against the Kōdōkan's response to Sarah's Butokukai *shōdan*. We have seen the evidence of the Kōdōkan's former interest, and in many ways, support of her judo ambitions, although, in the April edition of *Judo*, which told of her *ikkyū* award, the headline translates as 'Mrs. Mayer is First *Kyū*' with the subheading 'Not First *Dan*'.<sup>265</sup> Beginning with, 'Mrs. Sarah Mayer whom we featured in our previous editions several times, has been awarded first *kyū* by Kōdōkan Ladies' Section', it finished with the simple statement 'Mrs. Mayer was awarded first *dan* from Butokukai'.<sup>266</sup>

This unassuming distinction between a Kōdōkan and Butokukai grade nonetheless held a significance for the judo community at that time. Having been party to the founding of the Butokukai in 1895, and placing Isogai and other Kōdōkan men in positions of authority within the structure, by the 1930s, Kanō grew increasingly disapproving of Butokukai standards for grading, labelling them 'reckless promotions' in the April edition of *Judo* in 1932.<sup>267</sup> Hoare published a translation of Kanō's words which outlined the differences between Butokukai and Kōdōkan *dan* grades.<sup>268</sup> It would seem that as Butokukai membership grew, the Kōdōkan allowed the other organisation to award low rank *dan* grades 'without reference to the Kodokan Deliberation Committee'.<sup>269</sup> As time went on, Kanō became concerned that standards were dropping, and that disparity between Kōdōkan and Butokukai *dan* grades was emerging. This article was published in the Kōdōkan magazine three years before Sarah's awards from the two organisations, and perhaps explains the

<sup>264</sup> Photograph, Image number: 00636240 Copyright: IMAGNO/Austrian Archives Artist: Anonymous, Date created: 9 April 1935 [online] [www.imagno.at](http://www.imagno.at) (accessed May 2017).

<sup>265</sup> 'Mrs Mayer is Ikkyū'.

<sup>266</sup> 'Mrs Mayer is Ikkyū'.

<sup>267</sup> Kanō Jigorō, 'Untitled,' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) April 1932, Kōdōkan Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese] translation in Hoare, *A History of Judo* p.117.

<sup>268</sup> Hoare, *A History of Judo* pp.116-117.

<sup>269</sup> Hoare, *A History of Judo* p.117.

reason that she received only a first *kyū* from Kōdōkan, and a *shōdan* from Isogai at the Butokukai in such a short time period, and Kōdōkan's subsequent reaction.<sup>270</sup> In the iconic photograph of Sarah, taken at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, which helped to inspire this project, and is reproduced at the beginning of this thesis, she is wearing a solid black belt, with no stripe, showing a defiance of the Kōdōkan convention for women, and that the award was not condoned by the organisation.

On 29 March 1935, eleven days before she left Yokohama for the journey back to England, Sarah gave a speech at the Imperial Hotel.<sup>271</sup> The headline for the event in *The Japan Times* was 'Judo Develops Moral Attitude, Says Mrs. Mayor [sic]'.<sup>272</sup> Speaking at a meeting of the Pan Pacific club, Sarah's words mimicked the piece which was published in the Kōdōkan *Judo* publication, where she spoke about the numbers of women at the Budokwai.

'We have a club in London ... We have about 500 members, of whom 50 are women. They are all very enthusiastic about judo but as far as the women are concerned we have not had enough time to practice, for we only have about two evenings a week.'<sup>273</sup>

This was followed with a moment of humility: 'If some of our women could come here I am sure they would have done much better than I have, for some of them are very good.'<sup>274</sup>

This may have been correct, although Sarah did have an international impact and her legacy as a global role model for women in judo emerged within the first year. As the March 1936 issue of Kōdōkan's *Judo* magazine showed, women in the United States of America or 'Yankee' ladies, as the article called them, were keen to try judo having seen articles in local press about Sarah. The piece

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<sup>270</sup> 'Mrs Mayer is Ikkyū not Shōdan'.

<sup>271</sup> 'Feminine Judo Expert to Speak' *The Japan Times* 29 March 1935 p.4; 'China Badly in Need of Help' *Trans-Pacific* 4 April 1935 p.14.

<sup>272</sup> 'Judo Develops Moral Attitude, Says Mrs Mayor [sic]' *The Japan Times* 31 March 1935 p.2.

<sup>273</sup> 'Judo Develops Moral Attitude' p.2.

<sup>274</sup> 'Judo Develops Moral Attitude' p.2.

stated that '[They were] making enquiries at the Japanese Embassy. Some going to shops run by Japanese to ask about Judo training'.<sup>275</sup>

This impact did not continue for long though, and within a few years, helped along by the Second World War, Sarah's name became a neglected part of judo history.

#### 4.9 Chapter Four: Conclusions

It is conceivable that, had Sarah's start in Kōbe not been so successful, and if her sensei Yamamoto had not been so amenable to the idea of Sarah studying judo, her experience and subsequent success in Japan would have been very different. His support of her as a female in the male environment at Kōbe, and his encouragement of her visit to Kyoto, where she was also accepted into the male *dōjō*, are likely to have affected her later decision to avoid the women's *dōjō* at the Kōdōkan, therefore giving her access to senior coaches who were teaching the men. It was also in Kōbe that Sarah began to train seven days a week, in comparison to the two nights available to her at the Budokwai in London, therefore readying her for the hard, physical experiences that lay ahead.

Sarah's immediate impact on arrival, with press interest as soon as she set foot on the mat, is likely to have influenced the later use of her by the establishment for the promotion of both judo for women and for tourism. The use of Sarah's image, during a difficult time in Japan's international relationships also relates to the history of Anglo-Japanese affairs and can be seen as part of Japan's 'cultural propaganda'.<sup>276</sup>

This publicity also demonstrates the western influence on Japan in a feminine paradigm. With Sarah's two female friends in Kōbe, the juxtaposition between the modern and more traditional conventions for Japanese women was exemplified. Sarah's modernity as a blonde woman, in fashionable western clothes, casually smoking cigarettes, connects to the global 'Modern Girl', but

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<sup>275</sup> 'Ladies' Judo Fever' *Judo* (Kōdōkan Publication) March 1936 p.30, Kōdōkan Archive, Tokyo [in Japanese].

<sup>276</sup> John Pardoe, 'British Writing on Contemporary Japan,' in Gordon Daniels and Chushiki Tsuzuki (eds), *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000: Social and Cultural Perspectives* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2002) p.301.

specifically Japanese '*Modan Gāru*' and the advertising and commercial benefits of such: as Weinbaum et al state, 'For contemporaries the modern girl was a harbinger of both the possibilities and dangers of modern life'.<sup>277</sup>

The Sino-Japanese conflicts created a need for Japan to present a more positive image internationally, and with initiatives to encourage foreign money into the country through tourism came the drive for a show of cultural cosmopolitanism.<sup>278</sup> Despite the political difficulties between Britain and Japan, the strength of Japanese hospitality with regards to Sarah, being treated as a visiting dignitary in Kōbe, and almost every wish seemingly fulfilled, shows a conformity to the tourism ideals of the period.

Another westerner, a Mr. Nicholas, who had visited the Kōdōkan to watch the *kan-geiko* while Sarah was there, told her that he had learnt judo at the Budokwai in London, and that he was in the 'early stages'.<sup>279</sup> The fact that this man does not appear to have been lauded in the same way that Sarah was, is interesting to consider. If the aspect of Sarah that caused the fascination with her was her western appearance, then why was this man not treated in the same way? There had been other European *jūdōka* at the Kōdōkan long before Sarah, for example H. M. Hughes, Carlo Oletti, E. J. Harrison and W. E. Steers, so it was not unprecedented, but none seem to have attracted the press attention aimed at Sarah.<sup>280</sup> The emphasis on her 'Blonde Hair' in the articles found, may give a clue to the difference. The other visitors had all been male and were perhaps therefore not seen as so unusual. Sarah's 'otherness' as a woman, not looking or behaving as Japanese society would expect, differentiated her, even from other westerners. Her enthusiasm for judo, and dedication to training daily, perhaps allowed the establishment to indulge her with attention and permit her access to otherwise forbidden environments for women. As a striking figure, with an acting background, she was also perfect for propaganda uses, whether they be confined to international judo ambition, or the national drive for foreign integration and/or domination.

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<sup>277</sup> Weinbaum, *The Modern Girl Around the World* p.8; Sato, *The New Japanese Woman* p.17.

<sup>278</sup> Abel, 'Cultural Internationalism' p.17.

<sup>279</sup> Letter Seven.

<sup>280</sup> Stevens, *The way of Judo* pp.186-190.

Sarah's acceptance within the male environs of both the Butokukai and the Kōdōkan is important for the history of women in judo. The fact that the majority of her coaches treated her as a 'small boy' goes some way to explaining why this particular woman became a pioneer for her sex.<sup>281</sup> Sarah's ability to assimilate as a pupil contrasts with her stance against the women's *dōjō* and her reluctance to conform to the gender norm. Her training regime, and the calibre of her teachers, were of the highest possible standard. There cannot have been many other *jūdōka*, either foreign or Japanese, who were trained by five of the first six men to have ever received Kōdōkan *jūdan*.

Sarah's judo aims were perhaps encouraged towards a more ambitious nature by a reporter's forecast of a potential *shōdan*.<sup>282</sup> The fact that the Kōdōkan awarded her a first *kyū* as part of the ladies' section promotions, compared with the 'male' equivalent *shōdan* from the Butokukai, gives compelling evidence of the differing standards between the two schools at the time. However, without these opposing measures, Sarah's pioneering legacy might never have surfaced.

Sarah's intention to build her own *dōjō* for practice on her return to Britain shows a degree of sincerity about her judo training, and her inclusion in the arduous and tough environment of the *kan-geiko* sessions demonstrates a reciprocal response from the Kōdōkan. The promotion of the health-giving benefits of judo, reflecting earlier Japanese women's experiences also reveals a complicity with the judo establishment;<sup>283</sup> and her part in helping to facilitate Hatta's trip to England, and therefore the international promulgation of judo is a significant contribution to the development of the sport and philosophy worldwide.

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<sup>281</sup> Letter Six.

<sup>282</sup> 'Blonde Hair *Jūjutsu*'

<sup>283</sup> Bennett, *Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan* p.132.



## 5. The Millionairess

‘A tragic looking woman, athletically built and expensively dressed, storms into the room.’<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction

To conclude this biographical work, this chapter charts the final twenty-two years of Sarah’s life, considering the later effects of her pioneering adventure. This continues to provide answers to the reasons why such an important female sporting role model became forgotten, not only by the public but by historians of sport. Beginning with Sarah’s somewhat troublesome return to England and the break-up of her second marriage, this chapter considers Sarah’s reacquaintance with employment in a theatrical setting against her role of socialite wife and dependant, as her need for income returned.<sup>2</sup> The professional social group to which she returned is investigated to establish her changing place within society, linking to Chapter Two of this work.

As wartime loomed for a second time in Sarah’s life, the third section of this chapter reflects on her divided patriotic loyalty, looking at national sensibilities regarding the increasingly difficult political relationship between Britain and Japan. With Sarah’s new employment, we consider a change in fortune, following a brief return to theatrical acclaim, with connections to George Bernard Shaw and a rise in the theatrical hierarchy. Finally, Sarah’s work during the Second World War, in which she played an active role on the home front, is juxtaposed against her gradual decline in prosperity and health.

To begin, however, Sarah’s journey home from Japan is examined as once again we see her as a tourist, completing a circumnavigation of the globe, and receiving perhaps an unexpected welcome home.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from stage direction in *The Millionairess* describing entrance of character played by Sarah in, George Bernard Shaw, *The Simpleton, The Six and The Millionairess: Being Three More Plays by Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable and Company 1936) p.131.

<sup>2</sup> Works looking at gender roles in entrepreneurial theatre include, Maggie B. Gale, ‘Women Playwrights of the 1920s and 1930s,’ in Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt (eds), *Modern British Women Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p.23-37; Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage* (London: Routledge, 1996); Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge 1991).

## 5.2 A Hero's Return? 1935-1936

Unlike Sarah's journey out to Japan, no autobiographical evidence has been found for the trip home, making it difficult to define her feelings regarding her achievement, and the expectations of how that would impact on her life on return. Once again, we rely on public record to piece together the details.

On 9 April 1935, Sarah left Yokohama on the *Hiye Maru*, arriving in Vancouver on 20 April.<sup>3</sup> The passenger information on the ship's manifest for the Canadian Immigration Service stated that she was a housewife, in transit to Europe, and would be travelling onwards from Vancouver, inland, with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.<sup>4</sup> It gave her intended destination as Quarr House, Sway, naming her husband as R. J. Mayer, giving a final indication that she had not intended to leave Robert and break up her marriage with her trip. She appears to have been travelling alone as none of the names known to be associated with her are to be found on the passenger list for that journey.<sup>5</sup>

A contemporary timetable for The Dominion train service across Canada, held with the Canadian Pacific Archives, shows that the train journey from Vancouver to Montreal took a total of three and a half days, with ample opportunities to disembark for sightseeing stopovers with over thirty stations on the way.<sup>6</sup>

The service ran every day of the week, leaving Vancouver at 2.45pm Pacific Time.<sup>7</sup> At Montreal, Sarah boarded the Canadian Pacific ship S.S. *Montcalm*, arriving in Southampton in the U.K. on 4 May 1935.<sup>8</sup> She travelled in the superior Cabin Class, as opposed to the slightly less salubrious 'Tourist Class' and 'Third Class' options. Again, from a search through the three hundred and fifty-four 'souls' on board, their destinations, and other details, there appears to have been no-one connected with Sarah aboard. A brochure for the 1934 sailings (the 1935 version could not be found) shows that the journey on the

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<sup>3</sup> *Hiye Maru*, Departure 9 April 1935, Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865-1935, [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed July 2018).

<sup>4</sup> *Hiye Maru*, Departure 9 April 1935.

<sup>5</sup> *Hiye Maru*, Departure 9 April 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.), Dominion Timetable (1934), The Canadian Pacific Railway Archives, Montréal.

<sup>7</sup> C.P.R., Dominion Timetable (1934).

<sup>8</sup> S.S. *Montcalm*, Southampton, Arrival 4 May 1935, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed July 2018).

*Montcalm* was scheduled to take nine days.<sup>9</sup> Sarah's arrival date in Southampton therefore provides a leaving date from Montreal as 26 April. As Sarah had arrived in Vancouver on 20 April, this, in turn, implies that it took her six days to travel across Canada, giving her approximately three days free for tourism and sightseeing.

On Tuesday 28 May, twenty-four days after her arrival home, Sarah issued a divorce suit against Robert, citing Mrs. Dorothy Harris as co-respondent.<sup>10</sup> The later divorce papers stated that from 14 September 1934, while Sarah had been away, Robert had been 'co-habiting' at Quarr House with Dorothy. A copy of the petition was sent to Robert and to Dorothy, whose address was also given as Quarr House. Sarah was said to be living at Mount Royal, Marble Arch, London. The relationship between Robert and Dorothy appears to have ended in 1938/9. Robert subsequently married again and went on to have children who are still living, and to whom this project owes a huge debt of gratitude.

In an attempt to understand Sarah's later decline to obscurity, the divorce settlement held at The National Archives, which was finalised in 1936, has been studied. Robert was ordered to pay her court costs, which came to £65 11s 2d plus £450 per year to Sarah for the rest of her life (secured by Deed of Covenant), and another £450 for the remainder of their joint lives. This was a substantial sum in 1936 but does not appear to have been set to increase in future in line with inflation. The divorce papers did not show any other monetary agreement, and there has been no other documentary evidence found in the family papers.

With this divorce, Sarah was conforming to national and societal trends. Rowntree and Carrier show that, since Sarah's previous marriage break-up, there had been a trend increase in divorce rate in England and Wales of around 45%, with 4,578 High Court petitions between 1930-1934. They note that 'the more liberal attitude established in the aftermath of [The First World] War,

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<sup>9</sup> Canadian Pacific Shipping Department, Brochure for Sailings and Prices to Europe, 1934, Ingenium - Canada's Museums of Science and Innovation, Ontario.

<sup>10</sup> Divorce Papers for Sarah Winifred Benedict Mayer and Robert John Mayer, 1935, J77/3463/5658, T.N.A.

appears to have been extended, at least in the upper and middle classes to all divorces of the 1920's and 1930's.'<sup>11</sup>

Despite her personal issues, Sarah's links to Japan and judo continued. Hatta arrived in London on 30 June 1935.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Sarah, who had travelled alone, Ichiro was accompanied by four other young Japanese men. Also unlike Sarah, they travelled third class, and were the only passengers on the ship from Yokohama to London to do so.<sup>13</sup> The passenger list had Ichiro (spelt Itiro) as the first of the men, and gave his occupation as 'none'. The other four, were listed as 'student'. The men's names were given as Kodama Masami, Kikuma Torea, Kazama Eiichi, and Tamba Kojiro. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was the intended Japanese wrestling team for the Berlin Olympics, planned for the following year.<sup>14</sup> The team which actually fought at the Olympic Games differed slightly. Tamba and Kazama who were from Waseda University were included, but three other men joined them, two from Meiji University and one other from Waseda.<sup>15</sup>

It was only after Ichiro had arrived in London that Sarah's name appeared in the Budokwai signing in books. The first instance of her signature was Tuesday 2 July, two days after his arrival, but it wasn't until 20 August that their names appeared together. In fact, on that date, theirs were the only signatures, showing that perhaps they were practising alone, or possibly the other Japanese wrestlers were there with them and hadn't signed in.<sup>16</sup> Between the beginning of July and the end of September 1935, Sarah signed in to the Budokwai eight times: on 2 July, 8 and 20 August, and 5, 6, 10, 17, and 21 September. The pages for the period following have been torn from the book, and resume from March 1937.<sup>17</sup> The reason for the lack of evidence of Sarah's practice early after her return to England, may possibly be put down to her

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<sup>11</sup> Griselda Rowntree and Norman H. Carrier, 'The Resort to Divorce in England and Wales, 1858-1957,' *Population Studies* 11:3 (1958) pp.190,199 & 213.

<sup>12</sup> *Hakone Maru*, London, Arrival 30 June 1935, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed July 2018).

<sup>13</sup> *Hakone Maru*, London, Arrival 30 June 1935.

<sup>14</sup> Letter Seven, Sarah Mayer to Gungi Koizumi, 9 January 1935, C.64, R.B.C.

<sup>15</sup> Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 E.V., *The XIth Olympic Games Berlin 1936: Official Report Volume 2* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert 1937) pp.715-736.

<sup>16</sup> The Budokwai, Signing in Books, 1935-1988, B.19, R.B.C.

<sup>17</sup> The Budokwai, Signing in Books, 1935-1988.

marital problems, and subsequent need for new accommodation, and the time needed to deal with those matters or simply the fact that she had not signed in.

However, it is at this point that we witness Sarah contributing to the encouragement and development of judo through mainland Europe, as there was another reason for her absence from the Budokwai through the summer months, and that was a trip away with Ichiro and the Japanese students.

The minutes of the Budokwai committee meeting for 17 June 1935, had a section titled 'Mr. Ichiro Hatta 5<sup>th</sup> dan'. It continued:

'They [Ichiro and his students] would probably stay in this country for the first week in July, and proceed to Berlin for wrestling practice against the Germans for three weeks, after which they would return to Japan. Mr. Hatta however would remain in Europe until after the Olympic Games (1936).'<sup>18</sup>

The first evidence found for Sarah's inclusion into the trip to mainland Europe was a short piece of film, held at the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna.<sup>19</sup> Within the August 1935 edition of *Österreich in Bild und Ton*, or Austria in Sound and Vision (a newsreel similar in style to British Pathé), there is a twenty-eight second clip entitled 'Jiu-Jitsu', which shows Sarah and Ichiro demonstrating judo in what appears to be a large field surrounded by trees. There was no information provided in the clip, just background music, so it may or may not have been filmed in Austria.

The next piece of evidence for the trip was to be found in a book written by the Hungarian *jūdōka* living in Czechoslovakia, István Fülöp, otherwise known as S. F. Dobó. Titled *Základy Jiu-Jitsu*, or *Fundamentals of Jiu Jitsu*, and published in 1937, within the book there are photographs of both Ichiro and Sarah on their visit to the country.<sup>20</sup> The photograph of Ichiro showed him with Professor Sugiyama Kenji, who was said to have visited with Sarah and Ichiro, and three other men who were Czech judo teachers on a course for coaches. (Sugiyama appeared in the signing in books of the Budokwai in August 1935.<sup>21</sup>) The

<sup>18</sup> The Budokwai, Minutes of the Budokwai Committee Meeting, 17 June 1935, B.14, R.B.C.

<sup>19</sup> *Österreich in Bild und Ton*, ÖBuT-Ausgabe 35a/35, 1935, The Austrian Film Museum, Vienna.

<sup>20</sup> S. F. Dobó, *Základy Jiu Jitsu* (Prague: Ústav Tělesné Výchovy při č. vys. školách 1937) n.p.

<sup>21</sup> The Budokwai, Signing in Books, 1935-1988.

photograph of Sarah showed her strangling Dobó, and the caption translates as 'Women can grow in judo as well as men.'

A search of European contemporary newspapers through the European Library, found the Estonian newspaper *Sakala* running a photograph of Ichiro and Sarah on 22 July 1935.<sup>22</sup> A translation of the caption reads, 'Best judo players in the world.' Continuing, 'On the left is the best Japanese judo player Hatta, and on the right Miss Mayer (English) who is considered to be the best female judo player in the world.'

This body of evidence shows Sarah at the vanguard of the promotion of judo for women in Czechoslovakia, Austria, and possibly other European countries. Petr Brezina, an amateur historian, has written about the history of Czechoslovakian judo, and in a piece edited for the *Kano Society Bulletin*, he described the 'dissemination' of judo into the region as beginning in the early 1930s.<sup>23</sup>

During the first few months of being home, Sarah was also demonstrating a will to become more involved and improve standards at the Budokwai. The committee meeting minutes, which spoke of Ichiro's intention to visit, had, on the same date, shown that despite the lack of evidence in the signing in books, Sarah had made contact with the Society and expressed an interest in becoming more concerned with the day to day running.<sup>24</sup>

'The Secretary reported that one of the lady members – Mrs. S. B. Mayer who had recently spent a year in China and Japan – was willing to undertake secretarial duties on behalf of the Budokwai. Col. Hopkins proposed and Mr. Harrison seconded that Mrs. Mayer be appointed Hon. Sec. of the Ladies section.'<sup>25</sup>

This meeting pre-dated Sarah's first signature in the signing in books by a fortnight. Thus began a short period where Sarah seems to have enjoyed a good relationship with members of the Budokwai committee. The new Honorary Secretary of the Ladies' Section threw herself, and, presumably, her husband's

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<sup>22</sup> 'Paremad Judo-Võistljud Maailmas' *Sakala* 22 July 1935 p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Petr Brezina, 'The Early Days of Judo in Czechoslovak Republic,' Liŷr Jones (ed), *Kano Society Bulletin* 25 (March 2015) pp.1-4.

<sup>24</sup> The Budokwai, Minutes, 17 June 1935.

<sup>25</sup> The Budokwai, Minutes, 17 June 1935.

money as the divorce was not yet finalised, into refurbishment of the Society.<sup>26</sup> A later committee meeting urged the Secretary to send a letter of thanks to Sarah for her 'very excellent work' and 'efforts in cleaning up [the] premises, and reconstructing [the] entrance hall and office.'<sup>27</sup> Like her donation to the Kōdōkan, this seemingly altruistic gesture could be interpreted in a number of ways: as seeking approval from her peers, as a way of spending Robert's money, or as a genuine wish to contribute to the Society in which she felt respected and included.

Gender distinction seems to have been the standard way to divide judo classes at the Budokwai during this period, and having only trained with men in Japan, back in Britain, apart from Ichiro, Sarah appeared to be mainly practising with other women. As shown, throughout September 1935, Sarah signed in to practice at the Budokwai five times. Two days running, on Thursday the 5<sup>th</sup> and Friday the 6<sup>th</sup>, the latter of which, hers was the only signature, so presumably she was spending time with either Koizumi or Tani, or both. Then two Tuesdays in a row, apparently Ladies' night, one of which she was joined by Moya Tani, Yukio Tani's daughter, who has, in later years, given an insight into early *jūjutsu* in Britain, through an interview in Keiko Itoh's *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain*.<sup>28</sup> In the last surviving record of Sarah signing in, on Saturday 21 September, she was joined by the Misses Woolhouse, Gulley and Mayhew.<sup>29</sup>

Beatrice Woolhouse, who was a personal assistant to Mr. Koizumi, as well as a Budokwai *dan* grade, had joined the Society in September 1924, sixteen months before Sarah's first entrance, and over three years before Sarah re-joined in November 1927.<sup>30</sup> It could be assumed that Gulley and Mayhew joined the Budokwai after 1928, as neither appear on the list of people who took membership between 1918, when the Society was founded, and 1928.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The Budokwai, Minutes of the Budokwai Committee Meeting, 29 [actually 28] December 1935, B.14, R.B.C.

<sup>27</sup> The Budokwai, Minutes of the Budokwai Committee Meeting, undated 1935, p.78, B.14, R.B.C.

<sup>28</sup> Keiko Itoh, *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain: From Integration to Disintegration* (London and New York: Routledge 2001) pp.165-168.

<sup>29</sup> The Budokwai, Signing in Books, 1935-1988.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Bowen, 'Appendix' B.64, R.B.C.

<sup>31</sup> Bowen, 'Appendix'.

Sarah's image as a *jūdoka*, despite the rising anti-Japanese feeling in Britain, was still seen as interesting and unusual. In December 1935, Sarah and Ichiro took part in the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Display of the Budokwai at The Stadium Club in London. They performed *kime-no-kata*, which was one of the *kata* Sarah had attempted to perfect for her grading in Japan. The demonstration was filmed by British Movietone News and shown in cinemas across the country.<sup>32</sup>

Despite this national recognition, the final time Sarah was mentioned in the minutes of the Budokwai Committee meetings was dated Thursday 16 January 1936, when there had apparently been some changes:

'The Secretary informed the meeting that Mrs. Mayer and Mr. Hatta had left the Budokwai with the intention of building a dojo in the country. He proposed that in order to stay in touch with Mr. Hatta, the society should occasionally have instruction from him. It was decided that he should be invited to visit the dojo for an occasional evening when funds permitted.'<sup>33</sup>

There has been no evidence found of this intended *dōjō* in the country. The evidence gathered for this period places Sarah at an address in Sway, near to Quarr House, as well as her London flat. These are telephone directory entries in the name of Mrs. S. R. [sic] Mayer at Clays Copse, Sway;<sup>34</sup> the electoral register for Sway 1936/1937 showing Sarah Mayer at Clays Copse;<sup>35</sup> and a letter from Robert Nichols to Sarah mentioning Clays Copse, undated, but amongst a collection of other letters dated 13 March-26 July 1936.<sup>36</sup> This gives an indication of Sarah's residence away from London. Therefore, a wide-ranging search for 1936 was made of local newspapers held at the Sway library, and local trade directories for Sway and the surrounding areas, held at the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester, for any mention of a *dōjō*, or judo classes in general. However, no reference was found.

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<sup>32</sup> British Movietone News, 'Falling is an Art at Judo or Rodeo' Story Number BM4122, 12 December 1935 [online] [www.aparchive.com](http://www.aparchive.com) (accessed September 2018).

<sup>33</sup> The Budokwai, Minutes of The Budokwai Committee Meeting, 16 January 1936, B.14, R.B.C.

<sup>34</sup> G.P.O. British Phone Books (1880-1984) S. R. Mayer, Sway, Hampshire, 1936-1946, [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed July 2018).

<sup>35</sup> Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, Hampshire, Sarah Mayer, Sway, 1936/1937, Hampshire Archives and Local Studies Centre, Winchester.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Malise Bowyer Nichols, Undated Letter, Nichols Collection of Papers 1911-1941, Outgoing Correspondence, Mayer, Sarah ("Sally") St. Benedict, Berg Coll MSS Nichols, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.



Although the Budokwai committee were keen to keep in touch with Ichiro, they seemed uninterested in continuing a connection with Sarah. Despite the work that Sarah had done with the refurbishment of the building, the fact that she had taken the position of Honorary Secretary of the Ladies' Section, and her networks and publicity for the Society, which continued after her departure, it would seem that there was a certain ambivalence to her exit.

We must, however, consider that Sarah was a minor celebrity at that time. In addition to the numerous newspaper articles about her *shōdan* achievement earlier in the year, on 5 December 1935 there was a small piece in the *Daily Mirror* on a page entitled 'News About People' concerning Sarah and her judo exploits.<sup>37</sup> The page was a type of gossip column, with no by-line for the author, but among the other 'people' mentioned are Lady Plunkett, Mrs. Somerset Maugham, Gabriel Toyne the actor producer (who was later to star with Sarah in a production of *The Millionairess*), and Rosita Forbes the explorer.

The piece about Sarah is, like the rest of the page, humorous in tone:

'If you ever meet MRS. ROBIN MAYER - remember, no funny business! She's a beautiful platinum blonde, but she is, too, the only woman in the world to hold a man's judo degree. And judo, if you're still doubtful, is the most up-to-date form of jiu-jitsu.'

This follows with a mis-remembered affirmation that she was given her 'degree' at the 'University of Tokio', and the fact that she had made Japan her 'life study', with the aside 'Queer – but there it is.'

'I was dining with her, and soon had a thought:

'If Mrs. Mayer had taken part in one of the many conferences we have had with Japan she would, I am sure, have achieved greater results than the cleverest of diplomats.'<sup>38</sup>

The conferences mentioned were concerning Japanese actions in Manchuria. Although the following quote from Sarah showed little diplomacy.

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<sup>37</sup> 'If You Ever Meet Mrs Robin Mayer' *The Daily Mirror* 5 December 1935 p.11.

<sup>38</sup> 'If You Ever Meet Mrs Robin Mayer'.

‘The Japanese male has the mentality of an intellectual European woman. He will, for instance, postpone a putt in the middle of an important game of golf to admire a flower on the course.’<sup>39</sup>

Whether Sarah actually said these words or was aware that they would be printed is unknown, but it does show that she was keen to share her judo experiences and Japanese adventures in a social setting. It could also account in part, for the lack of interest from the Budokwai when she left shortly afterwards, although her relationship with Ichiro continued. The Robert Nichols letters mentioned Ichiro as her friend whom Nichols had met at her house in 1936.<sup>40</sup> Although incredibly difficult to read, these letters often refer to her interest in judo, showing that it did not wane during her first year back in Britain.

Robert Nichols (1893-1944) was a poet and playwright, with connections to other First World War poets, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves.<sup>41</sup> He also had an association with Augustus John, who was linked to the Budokwai through his family and whose name has frequently emerged in this research as an associate once removed from Sarah.<sup>42</sup> Nichols’ first letter to Sarah was six foolscap pages long, and following an apology for the paper used, as it was easier to write on in bed, began with:

‘I’ve been thinking about you – your courage, good looks, sensitiveness, inability to escape from self and the look of profound distress in your eyes.’<sup>43</sup>

This letter provides evidence that in 1936, Sarah was still involved with judo and had a continued relationship with Ichiro. It would seem from the content, that Sarah and Nichols had recently met at an event and she had invited him to visit her in the country that weekend to meet her ‘Japanese friend’. His reaction was to apologise that he had said yes, as he couldn’t make it. He also implied that

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<sup>39</sup> ‘If You Ever Meet Mrs Robin Mayer’.

<sup>40</sup> Nichols Letter, 13 March 1936.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Penguin Books 1988) p.241; For an overview of the life of Robert Nichols see, Anne and William Charlton, *Putting Poetry First: A Life of Robert Nichols 1893-1944* (Norwich: Michael Russell 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Charlton and Charlton, *Putting Poetry First* p.77.

<sup>43</sup> Nichols Letter, 13 March 1936.

he and she might start up a relationship if he did, and went into effusive detail about how she was 'starving for tenderness':<sup>44</sup>

'It's natural enough in an alternative woman who has been married 13 years and finds herself alone, who has been ill-treated, who has suffered an enormous blow to her self esteem, who is of ... [an] imperious nature.'<sup>45</sup>

This is clearly the persona that Sarah was presenting socially, but the Nichols letters give more insight perhaps into Nichols' character than Sarah's, and without her replies, it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the challenges facing Sarah at that time. However, when analysed they can provide certain clues and details, which in turn give insights into the circles and social strata within which, following the break-up of her marriage, she was engaged. Another aspect of the letters, of interest to the social historian, and providing, perhaps, the beginning of an answer to the reason for Sarah's subsequent decline to obscurity, is an indication of the methods she was using to medicate herself for anxiety. Nichols noted, in his first letter to Sarah, after referring to her illness, which he called K. P., that, 'The sleep business is another matter and I will discuss it – without name given – with my psychiatrist. Avoid the barbiturates. I came off even alcohol just as soon as I could.'<sup>46</sup>

A little later on the same day as the first letter, another note from Nichols arrived at Sarah's flat. In it he confirmed that he would contact his psychiatrist about the Chloral Hydrate that she had been taking. Before Sarah could reply, yet another postcard arrived.

'IMPORTANT

'10am. Have just rung my psychiatrist Dr Morris Robb, 72 Wimpole Street (Welbeck 9447 Home phone Primrose 3774). Chloral Hydrate is definitely habit forming and dangerous. In proper hands you can get straight pretty

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<sup>44</sup> Nichols Letter, 13 March 1936.

<sup>45</sup> Nichols Letter, 13 March 1936.

<sup>46</sup> Nichols Letter, 13 March 1936.

soon ... Robb will be free at 1 today if you ring now as I'm not going ... Be sensible and be sensible at once.'<sup>47</sup>

Morris Robb was an eminent doctor, who later lectured on 'Psychotherapy of Psychotics' at The Adlerian Society of Great Britain.<sup>48</sup> Sarah's drug of choice, which is now no longer available in the United Kingdom or the United States, is described by Lynne M. Quarmby thus:

'Chloral hydrate is a sedative–hypnotic that is sometimes used to relieve anxiety or to induce sleep. It has long been a drug of abuse; a solution of chloral hydrate and alcohol constituted the infamous Mickey Finn.'<sup>49</sup>

With this evidence, we begin to see a decline in Sarah's mental and physical fitness, and this must have impacted on her ability to perform well at judo. Clearly, Nichols' discussion with Robb alarmed him enough to encourage Sarah to seek help. However, Nichols also offered more direct assistance with her career. She had asked him to put a word in for her at the Old Vic, a major theatre in London, where he had connections with the *King Lear* production being staged there. It was during this period of Sarah's life, that, despite any personal problems she was encountering, she returned to theatrical entrepreneurialism. This was a recurring theme following the break-up of her marriages; alternatively, it could be seen as a working woman who suspended employment due to marriage.

### 5.3 Hundreds and Thousands 1936-1939

Returning to the workplace, particularly in the theatre, involved having a network of contacts. A close friend and ally to Sarah at this point was Leon M. Lion (1879-1947) who lived in Baker Street, London. In the spring of 1936, he employed Sarah as Assistant Producer and Stage Director for a production in the West End at The Playhouse theatre.<sup>50</sup> Lion was a theatrical polymath, who acted, directed, produced, and managed, in theatre, film and television. His autobiography shows close associations with names such as John Galsworthy,

<sup>47</sup> Nichols Postcard, undated but following on from another postcard dated 13 March 1936.

<sup>48</sup> 'Diary of the Week' *Lancet* 5 November 1949 p.868.

<sup>49</sup> Lynne M. Quarmby, 'Cellular Deflagellation,' *International Review of Cytology* 233 (2004) pp.47-91.

<sup>50</sup> J. P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2014) p.526; Script of *My Son's My Son*, by D.H. Lawrence, completed by Walter Greenwood, Walter Greenwood Collection 1936-1970, GB 427 WGC/1/4/1, The University of Salford Archives & Special Collections.

Aldous Huxley, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and George Bernard Shaw.<sup>51</sup> In 1932, he produced and starred in the film *Number 17*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock.<sup>52</sup>

It is possible that Lion had been a friend of Sarah's father. They had worked together several times, for example in Ibsen's *The Master Builder* in 1911, when Alfred was Stage Manager for Harley Granville Barker at the Little Theatre, and in 1913 for The Pioneer Players in *Hamlet*, and therefore he may have stepped in to help his late friend's daughter.<sup>53</sup> Lion and Sarah may have had a romantic relationship, Lion was divorced from his wife of eighteen years in 1925, but there has been no proof of this found.<sup>54</sup> Whatever their association, Lion took Sarah under his wing, giving her not only background production team jobs, but also starring roles, and in 1939, after three years working together, they co-wrote a play. However, The Playhouse show, *My Son's My Son* by D. H. Lawrence, was the first production which has been found where Lion employed Sarah.<sup>55</sup> *The London Stage* notes that it ran for twenty-two performances from 26 May to 13 June 1936. The prompt copy from this production, currently held at the University of Salford, credited Sarah Benedict Tapping at the head of the production team as Stage Director, along with General Manager Mr. R. Steuart West, and Stage Manager Mr. Basil Cunard.<sup>56</sup>

As well as working in the theatre, Sarah used her judo training in conjunction with her writing skills for work during this time, with a series of seven, weekly features on self-defence for women for *The Daily Mirror* in late 1937.<sup>57</sup> *The Daily Mirror* had been in existence since 1903, when it was originally conceived as a paper for 'gentlewomen' and employed an all-female staff. That changed

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<sup>51</sup> Leon M. Lion, *The Surprise of My Life* (London and New York: Hutchinson 1948).

<sup>52</sup> Jane E. Sloan, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Filmography and Bibliography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1995) pp.104-105.

<sup>53</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1910-1919* 11.73; 'The Pioneer Players' "Hamlet" *The Era* 15 March 1913 p.15.

<sup>54</sup> Divorce Papers for Kathleen Crighton Lion and Leon Marks Lion, 1925, J77/2120/6396, T.N.A.

<sup>55</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939* p.526.

<sup>56</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939* p.526; Script of *My Son's My Son*.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily Mirror* editions 'She Knows What to Do!' 30 October 1937 p.11; 'Smile to Defend Yourself!' 6 November 1937 p.11; 'She Smiled at a Stranger!' 13 November 1937 p.13; 'The Attack that Every Woman Fears!' 20 November 1937 p.11; 'Attacked by her Friend!' 27 November 1937 p.11; 'Attacked by a Thief in her Bedroom!' 4 December 1937 p.11; 'How to Hold a Man When He's Down!' 11 December 1937 p.13.

two years later however, and it was rebranded as an illustrated newspaper.<sup>58</sup> Writing under the by-line of Sarah B. Mayer, she took various situations where women might be attacked by a man, giving detailed advice on how to react, and ultimately, incapacitate the offender. The articles were generally half page features, with the other half given to Victor Silvester, teaching new dance steps.

The articles were somewhat theatrical, with large photographs of a woman taking physical control over a man. The woman used in the images, although blonde, was not Sarah, and notes on most of the articles stated variously that the pictures were 'posed for the "Daily Mirror" to illustrate Sarah Mayer's advice'. The captions with the photographs had a cartoon quality, with text such as 'He grabs her', 'Perilous struggle on river bank follows... Splash', and 'Girl lays man out with savage thrust!'.

Saturday, November 20, 1937 THE DAILY MIRROR

**OUR SATURDAY PAGE**

**The attack that every woman fears!**

**SELF-DEFENCE: By SARAH B. MAYER**

**LONELY GIRL ASSAULTED BY ARMED TRAMP ON COUNTRY WALK!**

**HOUSEWIFE MENACED AS SHE OPENS DOOR TO STRANGER!**

**USING DEFENCE No. 1, SHE SEIZES STICK AT EACH END!**

**DEFENCE No. 2: GIRL LAYS MAN OUT WITH SAVAGE THRUST!**

**ATTACKER FORCES WAY IN... MEETS EXPERIENCED DEFENCE FROM EXPERT!**

**These photos were posed by models for the "Daily Mirror" self-defence series**

**SELF-DEFENCE: By SARAH B. MAYER**

**I**t often happens that a woman walking by herself in a lonely spot is accosted by a ruffian who demands money with menaces.

Or she may open the front door and find a tramp on the threshold who puts his foot in the door before she can shut it, and who forces his way into the house where, she realises with horror, she is alone. A lot of things may happen. I can deal here with only one or two possibilities.

The tramp, perhaps, raises a heavy stick and with his left hand seizes her head.

There must be no hesitation. She should jump forward and strike his right arm up with her left hand.

She then pulls her right arm under his arm in an upward direction. Now she catches hold of the back of her own left wrist and holds it tightly.

You will see that she now has her right arm at the back of his and her left at the front and that she is holding him in a lock.

Now she presses forwards and towards him, causing him to bend his elbow more and more and levering his shoulder backwards.

This will dislocate his shoulder and cause him to fall heavily and strike the back of his head on the ground.

Now the question arises: do the circumstances permit her to make a quick getaway or not? If not, she will be advised to obtain hold of his stick and if necessary use it.

This is the best way to use a stick or umbrella for defence.—Take hold of it at each end, holding it about four inches from the ends.

Now use the ferrule to jab your attacker in whatever portion of his anatomy provokes itself.

He will be unable to snatch it from you, as, if he catches it in the centre, you have only to twist it and he must leave go. And the ends are too short to allow him any purchase.

To attempt to strike with a stick will usually be ineffectual, for first the blow can be parried, and, secondly, it can easily be snatched away.

But a series of repeated and painful jabs with the ferrule of walking-stick or umbrella will disconcert most people.

Even an elderly woman, if she is spirited and sprightly, may well try this method and send a scamp about his business.

30. 'The Attack that Every Woman Fears!' *Daily Mirror* 20 November 1937.

It is interesting to see these articles in conjunction with the early interest in *jūjutsu* for women during the first decade of the twentieth century, with

<sup>58</sup> Kevin Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day: A History of Media and Communication in Britain* [second edition] (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2010) p.55; Chris Horrie, *Tabloid Nation: From the Birth of The Daily Mirror to the Death of the Tabloid* (London: André Deutsch 2003) p.17.

photographic displays of women fighting off male attackers in the national press, such as 'Jiu-Jitsu with the Umbrella' or 'Where Weakness is Strength'.<sup>59</sup>



31. 'Jiu-jitsu with the Umbrella' *Daily Express* 2 September 1908.

The first piece in Sarah's series began:

'Jiu-Jitsu is the Japanese national art of self-defence and fighting without weapons. I propose in this series to describe some tricks which women with no knowledge of Jiu-Jitsu may employ with advantage in the case of a sudden attack.'<sup>60</sup>

Apart from offering basic skills and techniques for particularly perilous situations for women, Sarah continued with an offer of personal help:

'A girl who has learnt jiu-jitsu is safe, if she keeps her head, in all the situations I have described in this series of articles, and I shall be pleased to give advice to any woman who writes to me.'<sup>61</sup>

It could be assumed that these features were written by Sarah purely as a piece of work for financial recompense in addition to her work in the theatre. There were no advertisements for a *dōjō* attached with the pieces, so it is unlikely that Sarah was using the forum to endorse any judo school, and as they were

<sup>59</sup> 'Jiu-Jitsu with the Umbrella' *Daily Express* 2 September 1908 p.7; 'Where Weakness is Strength' *Tatler* 22 November 1905 p.9.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah B. Mayer, 'She Knows What to Do!' *Daily Mirror* 30 October 1937 p.11.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah B. Mayer, 'Attacked by a Thief in her Bedroom' *Daily Mirror* 4 December 1937 p.11.

written in her married name, she seems not to have been promoting herself in her theatrical persona.

The additional knowledge contributed to this work with the existence of this series in a national publication in 1937 is twofold. Firstly, the fact that self-defence for women based on *jūjutsu* techniques was deemed popular enough for a half page spread for six weeks during the later inter-war years suggests a contribution to a wider study of women and *jūjutsu*/judo in the early twentieth century. Secondly, it supports continuing indications of Sarah's significance within women's history as an advocate of physical culture and equality.

This employment as a feature writer, which is related to her knowledge of judo, was not her only work in this period. In the theatre, she and Lion worked together again in the period leading up to the war, with another West End production, *Trumpeter, Play!* by Vere Sullivan, performed at The Garrick theatre in June 1938, with Sarah again employed as Assistant Producer.<sup>62</sup> No-one is named in *The London Stage* as Stage Director this time, so it is possible that Sarah revisited both roles, producing and directing.<sup>63</sup>

The following year, 1939, provides this work with an unusually large amount of publicly recorded evidence concerning Sarah, beginning on 23 January with the Brighton premiere of *Hundreds and Thousands*, the play co-written by Sarah and Lion.<sup>64</sup> Following the Brighton run, *Hundreds and Thousands* transferred to The Garrick theatre on 31 January, and starred Wilfred Lawson, Lion himself, and Eva Moore.<sup>65</sup>

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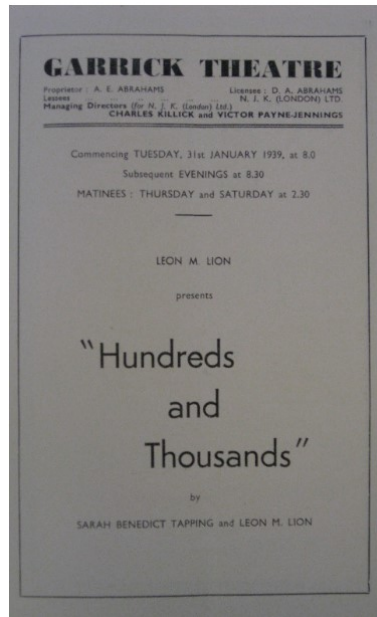
<sup>62</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939* p.685.

<sup>63</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939* p.685.

<sup>64</sup> 'Theatre Royal, Brighton' *Mid-Sussex Times* 24 January 1939 p.8; 'Hundreds and Thousands' *The Stage* 26 January 1939 p.9.

<sup>65</sup> 'The Garrick' *The Stage* 2 February 1939 p.8.





32. Programme for *Hundreds and Thousands*, Garrick Theatre, 1939, V&A Theatre Collection

In *The London Stage*, Sarah was not listed on the production team or cast, but she must have been present for rehearsals and the run, as Lion's autobiography described the first matinee at Brighton when the leading lady had an attack of quinsy (a throat infection) and could not perform, 'whereupon Miss Tapping, at literally ten minutes' notice, had stepped into the breach, and filled it with quite astonishing expertise.'<sup>66</sup> For a producer of Lion's calibre to have put his faith into a show co-authored by Sarah, to such an extent that he put it onto the West End stage, placed her into a different stratum of the hierarchy of theatrical personnel. Her professional standing among her peers would have lifted considerably. Even though she had been a playwright nearly twenty years earlier with Leslie Sparkes, a West End production projected a different calibre from her provincial employment before her marriage to Robert.

The play was not a success however, and closed after one week on 4 February.<sup>67</sup> So, Sarah's first play in the West End was a failure, and ten days later, more bad news was to come, with the death of her mother.<sup>68</sup> The main causes of death were 'Hypostatic Congestion of the Lungs ... Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema'.<sup>69</sup> Alice's will had been written in June 1934 whilst

<sup>66</sup> Lion, *The Surprise of My Life* p.142.

<sup>67</sup> Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939* p.685.

<sup>68</sup> Principal Probate Registry, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) Alice Amelia Tappin/Tapping, 1939 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed May 2018).

<sup>69</sup> Death Certificate, Alice Amelia Tapping, Lewisham, 14 February 1939, G.R.O.

Sarah was away in Japan before she and Robert had separated.<sup>70</sup> This is significant as Sarah was not mentioned at all in the will. Robert and her brother Tom were named as executors, and there were bequests of various sizes to staff and other family members. The bulk of the remainder of the estate, which had a net figure of just over £7,500 was left 'equally between my two sons'.<sup>71</sup> The reasons for the omission of Sarah in her mother's will are not known, but one possibility could be that due to her marriage to Robert, a wealthy man, Sarah was considered less in need in comparison to her brothers. Otherwise, her removal to Japan at the time of the will being drawn up, may have estranged her from the family. In any case, the will was never changed to include Sarah, and Robert fulfilled his obligation as co-executor, some four years after the break-up of their marriage.

In May 1939, Sarah's celebrity once again had a slight resurgence. Sarah and Leon had adapted *Hundreds and Thousands* for television, and for two performances, on 9 and 19 May, the twenty-five-minute-long adaptation showed on the BBC.<sup>72</sup> Lion described in his autobiography how most of the plays and dramas on the television at the time were given two outings.<sup>73</sup> This was so early for television that technology was not yet in place to record, and all performances were filmed and shown live.

Sarah's second entrepreneurial endeavour as a theatrical author had not made her fortune, but the television show wasn't the absolute end for *Hundreds and Thousands*. In July, the play was taken out, for what appears to be the final time, to The Little Theatre in Hull.<sup>74</sup> It is probable that the play had been let out for provincial use by other companies in order to make some more money from it. But Sarah's writing was not limited to plays, and on 6 August 1939 she wrote an article in a British national newspaper which was to speak directly to the political turmoil unfolding throughout Europe and the Pacific.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Will of Alice Amelia Tappin, Proven 22 March 1939, Principal Probate Registry, UK.

<sup>71</sup> Will of Alice Amelia Tappin.

<sup>72</sup> 'Television' *Radio Times* 6 January 1939 p.16.

<sup>73</sup> Lion, *The Surprise of My Life* p.251.

<sup>74</sup> 'Little Theatre' *Hull Daily Mail* 27 June 1939 p.7.

<sup>75</sup> Sarah Tapping, 'Having a Bath in Japan,' *The Sunday Express* 6 Aug 1939 p.10.

## 5.4 The Tientsin Response 1939

In August 1939, just a few weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War, Sarah was once again embroiled in the political sphere of propaganda. Her article in *The Sunday Express* was a reaction to particular Japanese hostilities against the Chinese and British Authorities known as the Tientsin Incident.<sup>76</sup> Issues had begun when a Chinese senior banker working for the Japanese was assassinated in Manchuria.<sup>77</sup> Sandra Wilson explains that Japan had been occupying and developing superiority over China since 1931, with the invasion of Manchuria.<sup>78</sup> With improving relations between the British and Chinese, so Anglo-Japanese tensions increased. However, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his supporters in Britain were keen to avoid all-out conflict with Japan. As with his famously unsuccessful appeasement policy towards Germany, Chamberlain preferred a type of collaboration over war, thus, as Watt demonstrates, making the British Governmental show of support for the 'sovereignty' and 'territorial integrity' of China, highly questionable.<sup>79</sup>

The assassination of the manager of the Japanese-owned Federal Reserve Bank of North China by a terrorist bomb attack at the Grand Theatre in Tientsin by Chinese Nationalists, caused relations between all three countries to deteriorate further.<sup>80</sup> The men held responsible by the Japanese, were hiding in the British Concession in Tientsin. British police captured them, and with a promise from the Japanese that no torture would be carried out, and that the accused men would be returned to British custody, turned them over to the Japanese authorities. Despite the agreement, the prisoners confessed under torture, and they were sent back to the British.

Watt describes how the wife of Chiang Kai-shek, chairman of the National Military Council of the Nationalist Government of the Republic of China, Madame Soong Mei-ling, is said to have confirmed to the British authorities that

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<sup>76</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath' p.10.

<sup>77</sup> Sebastian Swann, 'The Tientsin Incident 1939: A Case-Study of Japan's Imperial Dilemma in China,' Thesis for Ph.D., University of London (1998) p.43.

<sup>78</sup> Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-33* (London and New York: Routledge 2002) p.1.

<sup>79</sup> Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of The Second World War, 1938-1939* (New York: Pantheon Books 1989) p.358.

<sup>80</sup> Antony Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbour: Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936-1941* (London and New York: Routledge 2006) p.72; Swann, 'The Tientsin Incident' p 43.

the men were under-cover resistance operatives for the Nationalist Government, and pleaded with them not to return them to Japanese hands.<sup>81</sup> Swann, in his seminal work on the Crisis states that Chiang Kai-shek himself 'had talks with the British Ambassador about the Tientsin situation' on 'the same day that the suspects were handed back to the British authorities'.<sup>82</sup> The British Foreign Minister, Viscount Halifax, agreed not to put the men into Japanese hands again, and they were kept under British control. Sato considers that Japan was convinced that China's continued resistance to Japanese occupation was in large part due to British economic support, and that this convenient disagreement with Britain should be capitalised upon, in order to disrupt aid to China.<sup>83</sup>

The Concession was surrounded, and all British nationals who entered or left were publicly strip searched, causing public outrage as British sensibilities, as well as tightly held territories, were directly attacked.<sup>84</sup> Swann quotes from the contemporary Jamieson Reports on the situation:

'Two male British subjects leaving concession this morning (were) stripped naked, had their private parts tickled and were made to put on (their) clothes in the open.

'A Mr. Ivor House (who was) going out of the Concession through the Woodrow Wilson Street barrier was compelled to take off all his clothes, stretch his legs apart and have his hair searched in full view of many passers-by, including women.

'(Case of Mr. Whiteright and Mr. and Mrs. Finlay who were) told to go out and (whose) clothes were flung outside into road one by one after (them) so that (their) dressing took place in full public view.'<sup>85</sup>

Both Best and Watt agree that pressure was put on the British Government through this event, to move naval forces out of Europe, and into the Pacific, but

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<sup>81</sup> Watt, *How War Came* p.352.

<sup>82</sup> Swann, 'Tientsin Incident' p.57.

<sup>83</sup> Kyoze Sato, 'Japan's Position before the Outbreak of the European War in September 1939,' *Modern Asian Studies* 14:1 (1980) pp.129-143.

<sup>84</sup> Watt, *How War Came* p.354; Swann, 'Tientsin Incident' p.111.

<sup>85</sup> Quotes from Consul-General Jamieson's situation reports for Tientsin, 17, 18, 22 and 26 June 1939 in Swann p.111

the danger looming from German and Italian hostility, was too great to risk the loss of military strength in the Mediterranean, and around Britain.<sup>86</sup>

Sarah's article, which was related to the incident, was published on 6 August, and came at a time of major division within Japan, splitting government and armed forces, and with huge anti-British demonstrations taking place in Tokyo.<sup>87</sup> American newspapers described an event outside the British Embassy in Tokyo on 14 July 1939, where the antagonists 'hurled missiles and Japanese flags into the grounds and shouted anti-British epithets' in 'the biggest anti-foreign demonstration in recent Japanese history'.<sup>88</sup> British newspapers also reported on this event, with *The Western Daily Press* quoting a 'war office spokesman' as saying 'Never before in the history of Anglo-Japanese relations has hatred of Britain been so indelibly impressed on the minds of the Japanese people'.<sup>89</sup> Sarah's writing implied complete ignorance of the real aggression and implications of the situation.<sup>90</sup>

Her article, entitled 'Having a Bath in Japan' carried a photograph of a group of around twenty naked Japanese men in a large *onsen*, or bath, and began, 'To understand the recent episodes and behaviour of the Japanese at Tientsin, it is essential to have acquired a knack of seeing things through their eyes.'<sup>91</sup> It went on to explain why she had spent over a year in Japan, and that she had lived with a Japanese family, commenting that 'the head of the family was a retired Japanese admiral'. Sarah then described four separate occasions during her time there, which she felt accounted for Japanese attitudes to nudity, and therefore the lack of offence meant in the strip searches.

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<sup>86</sup> Best, *Britain, Japan, and Pearl Harbour* pp.79-86; Watt, *How War Came* p.356.

<sup>87</sup> Usui Katsumi, 'Anglo-Japanese Relations 1937-1941,' in Ian Nish (ed), *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919-1952: Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second World War* (Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press 2010) p.88.

<sup>88</sup> Quote from '15,000 Japanese Mass at British Embassy' *Syracuse Post* 14 July 1939 p.2; other examples include 'Tokyo Mob Defies British' *Oakland Tribune* 31 July 1939 p.1; 'Europe' *Hattiesburgh American* 31 July 1939 p.1.

<sup>89</sup> 'Anti-British Feeling' *Western Daily Press* 8 July 1939 p.7.

<sup>90</sup> Examples include, 'The Tientsin Crisis' *The Times* 17 June 1939 p.11; 'Challenge of Japan' *Hampshire Telegraph* 23 June 1939 p.13; 'Briton Refuses to Strip' *Leeds Mercury* 10 August 1939 p.5.

<sup>91</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath' p.10; also printed in Australia in *The Voice (Hobart, Tasmania)* 21 October 1939 p.4.



33. 'Having a Bath in Japan' *Sunday Express* 6 Aug 1939.

Her first example recounted how the bathroom at the Hatta family house had no locks, and when she was bathing, all members of the family would pop in and out to collect soap, or brush their teeth, ‘The admiral’s invariable remark, by way of reassurance, was: “Don’t worry, it’s only me”’.<sup>92</sup> The second told of an incident when she arrived early to a judo training session in Kōbe, and was sitting alone on the tiered benches by the mats wearing her *jūdōgi*. A Japanese man dressed in western style clothing, who had not encountered her there before, entered, and asked if she would like to practise with him. After she agreed, he undressed there and then, ‘politely expressing his gratification at encountering a foreigner’, before putting on his own *jūdōgi*. After that, Sarah claimed, she discovered that dressing in the *dōjō* at the side of the mats was the usual practice, but since she had been attending, they had retreated to the garden to change under a tree ‘rather than cause me any embarrassment’.<sup>93</sup>

The third incident described by Sarah, was this time in the bath itself, and she, naked, was joined by a male, who made light conversation. When the

<sup>92</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath'.

<sup>93</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath'.

temperature of the water, heated by a fire underneath became too much for her, the man explained the use of small towels to protect one's dignity when entering and leaving the water.

'The news having got about that I had shared the bath with one man, the rest soon followed, and all armed with our little towels, we spent many agreeable hours in conversation in the hot water.'<sup>94</sup>

Sarah's fourth example demonstrating differences in Japanese and British culture, was a story about how, in order to raise money for the victims of the Osaka typhoon, she challenged her male friends, who were wearing western dress, if they had left open their fly buttons, charging them one yen per button.

'In the lounge of the Imperial Hotel, frequented by many foreigners, I had cause to murmur to my companion: "Four Yen." He rose, made a casual examination and declared that it was only three. When I insisted ... he raised his voice in protest and invited me to count for myself.'<sup>95</sup>

The final part of this full-page feature brought the piece back to the Tientsin troubles.

'In the light of these experiences, it is not surprising that the Japanese thought little of stripping the foreigners whom they had been instructed to search, and must have thought they were being deliberately obstructed in their duty.'<sup>96</sup>

This work considers the naïveté of this article to speak volumes for Sarah's love of Japan and the Japanese. Despite the impending dangers of all-out war across the world, Sarah seemed to consider her experiences in Japan, bathing with male *jūdōka*, to fully explain the situation of repression and humiliation, intended as incitement to war. Swann quotes from Viscount Halifax, that The Tientsin Incident was 'causing him more anxiety than the (British) position in any other parts of the world'.<sup>97</sup>

Of course, it must be considered whether Sarah was once again being used as a pawn for diplomacy or propaganda related to a political agenda. The question

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<sup>94</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath'.

<sup>95</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath'.

<sup>96</sup> Tapping, 'Having a Bath'.

<sup>97</sup> Swann, 'Tientsin Incident' p.8.

arises; was it a (very small) contribution to British diplomatic endeavours to avoid war, that is, to show British empathy with the Japanese cause in order to ease tensions? Otherwise, *The Express* group was historically right-wing, known to support the appeasement policies of Chamberlain's government, famously running the headline 'No War This Year' on 7 August 1939, the day after Sarah's article.<sup>98</sup> Was the article commissioned by the newspaper to support their cause? Nish refers to the 'alienation between Britain and Japan, and the effort which was made by well-wishers on both sides to arrest the trend'.<sup>99</sup> It could be that Sarah was one of those well-wishers, attempting to disseminate goodwill and diffuse hostilities between the two nations. If any of these notions were true, was Sarah aware of the connotations and lack of support, by this time, from even ardent pro-Japanese sympathisers, as anti-fascism, evident at the time of Sarah's earlier publicity, grew?<sup>100</sup>

No evidence has been found of any communication to, from, or about Sarah, held in the Imperial War Museum, British Library, or The National Archives, which could support theories of her collusion in a wider strategy. That is not to say that there is a definite non-existence of such documentation, as many of the intelligence records from that time have been destroyed or have not been released. The concept of, and research into a contraposition, whereby Sarah was seen as a 'person of interest' by the British authorities, due to this pro-Japanese article at such a serious juncture in Anglo-Japanese relations, has also produced no evidence. A search of the KV2 series of The Security Service: Personal Files, held at The National Archives, which contain 'selected files from the First and Second World War periods and the inter-war years on suspected spies and double agents, ... Japanese intelligence agents, ... and other groups in which the Security Service took an interest', showed no entry for Sarah.<sup>101</sup> Again, this does not confirm a non-existence of such a record, just that none has been released as part of this series to the archives.

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<sup>98</sup> Sian Nicholas, "'There will be no war': The Daily Express and the Approach to War," in D. Welch and J. Fox (eds), *Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and the Modern Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012); Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 1998); 'No War This Year' *Daily Express* 7 August 1939 p.1.

<sup>99</sup> Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919-1952* p.viii.

<sup>100</sup> Julie V. Gottlieb, *Guilty Women, Foreign Policy, and Appeasement in Inter-War Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015) p.50.

<sup>101</sup> The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files 1913-1983, KV2, T.N.A.



This work considers that it is unlikely that Sarah was involved in any larger plots to encourage empathy with the Japanese cause, but, returning to the humorous article in *The Daily Mirror* nearly two years before, where the author considered Sarah to have been potentially more successful than the diplomatic professionals in repairing Anglo-Japanese relations, it is possible that she herself, thought that she might be contributing to a better understanding between the two nations.<sup>102</sup> Also, as a member of the theatrical profession, she could have been simply seeking self-promotion through her convenient connections to front page news. But the threat of war was very shortly to materialise, and Sarah's national loyalties would be tested.

### 5.5 Wartime and Shaw 1939-1945

As Sarah's article in *The Sunday Express* had come so shortly before the appeasement process failed, and war broke out in Europe, it is useful for this thesis to look into her position with regard to her own country, and establish whether her interest in judo had affected her patriotic stance. A note in the 1939 Register, shows that Sarah joined the ranks of volunteers drafted in to help protect people and property from German bombing and invasion as an Air Raid Patrol Warden or A.R.P.<sup>103</sup> The 1939 Register was produced on 29 September in that year, and is one of the very few resources for finding information about people in England and Wales around that time, due to the fact that the 1931 census records were destroyed and no 1941 census was taken.<sup>104</sup> The information given on the register covers the 'address, schedule number, sub number, surname, first name(s), role, gender, date of birth, marital status and occupation' of the subjects, and is arranged geographically.<sup>105</sup> However, there were subsequent additions and alterations made to the register, therefore it is not possible to be absolutely sure of the date of some of the amended information.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> 'If You Ever Meet Mrs Robin Mayer' *The Daily Mirror* 5 December 1935 p.11.

<sup>103</sup> Registrar General, Sarah B. Mayer, 1939 Register, St Marylebone, R39-0461-0461H-011, Schedule Number 209, T.N.A. UK [digital only].

<sup>104</sup> T.N.A. Research Guides, The 1939 Register [online] <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> (accessed July 2018).

<sup>105</sup> T.N.A. Research Guides, The 1939 Register.

<sup>106</sup> T.N.A. Research Guides, The 1939 Register.

Sarah was to be found in the St Marylebone area, at 33 Nottingham Place, which has been confirmed by electoral registers and phone books as having become her address in 1939.<sup>107</sup> Her name was originally listed as Sarah B. Mayer, however, at a later date this was crossed out and changed to Tapping, thus, confirming that, not only in her professional capacity, but through national registration, she reverted to her maiden and stage name. She gave her occupation as 'Theatre Producer, Dramatist, Actress, Author', giving an insight for the biographer into how she viewed and defined herself in terms of her profession. Her date of birth was the same as found on her original birth certificate. She was listed as a divorced female, and on the continuing page was the additional piece of evidence, simply written as "A.R.P. Ford's Hotel". This appears to have been added later than the original text, as it is in a different hand, and in red pen, rather than the black ink of the main body.

A.R.P. wardens began to be recruited as early as 1937.<sup>108</sup> The exact date upon which Sarah volunteered for the cause is not known; however, due to the discrepancy in ink on the register, it may have been later than 29 September. It is possible that Sarah saw action as an A.R.P. Warden, as the bomb map for London shows that two bombs fell close to her post.<sup>109</sup> Mike Brown quotes a female warden describing her job following a bomb:

'I go into a house, decide who's alive, who's dead, tot up the number of victims and what is necessary in the way of fire services, ambulances and demolition, etc. I'm quite used to seeing dead people'.<sup>110</sup>

It was not unusual for women to take up positions within the Civil Defence initiative, and advertising and recruitment posters were aimed at both sexes, although there were gender distinctions implicit in the roles allocated. Noakes asserts that the 'need for A.R.P. to appeal to as wide a range of potential

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<sup>107</sup> Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, London, England, Sarah B. Mayer, St Marylebone, 1939, LCC/PER, L.M.A.; G.P.O. British Phone Books (1880-1984) Sarah Benedict Tapping, Welbeck, London, 1939, [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed September 2018).

<sup>108</sup> Lucy Noakes and Susan R Grayzel, 'Defending the Home(land): Gendering Civil Defence from the First World War to the "War on Terror",' In Ana Carden-Coyne (ed), *Gender and Conflict Since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012) pp.53-70.

<sup>109</sup> High Explosive Bomb, Manchester Square and Blandford Street [online] [www.bombsight.org](http://www.bombsight.org) version 1.0 (accessed August 2018).

<sup>110</sup> Quote from *Hell's Corner 1940* (The Kent Messenger, 1942) in Mike Brown, *Put That Light Out: Britain's Civil Defence Services at War 1939-1945* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing 1999) p.50.

volunteers as possible was continually undercut by tensions around the gendered identities of civil defence workers.<sup>111</sup>

These tensions were exacerbated by wage differences between the sexes. Female A.R.P. wardens were recorded complaining about their lower wage in *The Daily Worker*, in June 1939, before war had even been declared, and the defence of that position appears to have been that wages were set in line with ratios of civil servants.<sup>112</sup> According to Rory Lalwan of the City of Westminster Archives, within the borough of St Marylebone there were 1,136 A.R.P. wardens, 284 of whom were women.<sup>113</sup> Sarah's position at Ford's Hotel, kept her in central Marylebone. The hotel was situated in Manchester Street, near Manchester Square, and had originally been a retreat for Roman Catholic guests.<sup>114</sup> As A.R.P. warden at the hotel, in peaceful moments, Sarah's responsibilities would have been to ensure total blackout from all windows, and that all people under her care had gas masks. She also needed to have an intimate knowledge of the area, supplies, and local people. In the event of an air raid warning, she would have had to ensure all were safely removed to their nearest shelter.<sup>115</sup>

No evidence has been found of Sarah continuing to practise judo at this point, or whether she was engaged in an entertainment role within the A.R.P., but her continued life in the theatre would have conflicted with her duties as a warden.<sup>116</sup> However, attacks from Germany were slow to appear, giving the period known as 'the phoney war', and after early closures of entertainment spaces on announcement of the declaration of war in Britain, just one month later, Winston Churchill, in his position as First Lord of the Admiralty, was keen to reopen as many venues as possible. In a letter to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, he stressed the importance of morale: 'while shelters should be

<sup>111</sup> Lucy Noakes, "'Serve to Save': Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937–41," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47:4 2012 p.751.

<sup>112</sup> 'Women ARP Wardens Up in Arms' *Daily Worker* 3 June 1939 p.1.

<sup>113</sup> Rory Lalwan, 'Civil Defence in St Marylebone 1939-1945,' [online] <http://www.westendatwar.org.uk/> (accessed July 2018).

<sup>114</sup> Anon, *The Catholic Directory and Annual Register for the Year 1840* (London: C. Richards 1840) p.202; John Fox, *Macnamara's Irish Colony and the United States Taking of California in 1846* (Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company 2000) p.58.

<sup>115</sup> Brown, *Put That Light Out* p.51.

<sup>116</sup> Civil Defence Personnel, Entertainments and Lectures, LCC/CL/CD/1/254, L.M.A.

hurried on with and strengthened, night and day, the people's spirits should be kept up by theatres and cinemas until the actual attack begins.'<sup>117</sup>

George Bernard Shaw, who was to feature in Sarah's life within a few months, wrote to *The Times* in early September: 'Sir, May I be allowed to protest vehemently against the order to close all theatres and picture houses during the war?'<sup>118</sup> The closures would obviously have prohibited Shaw's income from his plays, giving him fiscal motive, but his thoughts were in line with Churchill's recommendations, claiming that 'During the last War we had 80,000 soldiers on leave to amuse every night. There were not enough theatres for them ... are there to be no theatres for them this time?'<sup>119</sup> Churchill and Shaw were appeased, and theatres were allowed to stay open, and Leon M. Lion made no hesitation in contacting Shaw to ask if he could use some of his plays in a season at The Devonshire Park theatre in Eastbourne, with prospective plans to tour.<sup>120</sup>

It is at this juncture that the work demonstrates how Sarah was able to amalgamate her profession with her judo skills, and how these skills would help to promote judo, a Japanese martial art, through the period of great difficulty and aggression between the two nations. Sarah was dispatched to visit Shaw, who may have known her father through earlier theatrical connections, in order to secure the use of *The Millionairess*. She met up with him at his London flat in Whitehall Court on 30 November 1939, and seems to have succeeded in her mission, as a postcard was sent to Lion that afternoon:

'The woodpecker came tapping this morning

'She is THE Millionairess.

'She seems to me sent from heaven for the part; and the play is at your disposal if you care to try it.'<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Winston Churchill, Letter to Neville Chamberlain, 1 October 1939 CHAR 19/2C/303-307 Churchill Papers, Churchill College, University of Cambridge

<sup>118</sup> 'Theatres in Time of War' *The Times* 5 September 1939 p.6; *The Stage* 7 September 1939 p.5.

<sup>119</sup> 'Theatres in Time of War'.

<sup>120</sup> George Bernard Shaw, Letters to Hugh Beaumont, Note from Shaw to Beaumont, 1 (actually 7) July 1940, R. S. Weiner Collection, MO100, Special Collections, Colgate University Libraries.

<sup>121</sup> George Bernard Shaw, Postcard to Leon M. Lion, facsimile reproduced in *The Independent Shavian* 36:3 1997, p.56; Lion, *The Surprise of My Life* pp.142-144.

*The Millionairess*, which *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* called 'a frequently underrated comedy', centred around Epifania, a woman who had inherited vast sums of money from her father, and had separated from her husband, an expert pugilist.<sup>122</sup> Lion stated, in various publications, that in earlier versions of the play Epifania had also learnt how to box, and she dealt with those who crossed her by using those skills, but following Shaw's meeting with Sarah, he re-wrote the play so that Epifania was a *jūdoka*.<sup>123</sup> This is supported by the published works. The version published in 1936 reads:

'Epifania: My father held that women should be able to defend themselves against male brutality. He taught me to box. I became a boxing fan and went to all the championship fights. I saw Alastair [her husband] win the amateur heavy weight. He has a solar plexus punch that nothing can withstand.'<sup>124</sup>

Whereas in later editions the text was changed to:

'Epifania: My father held that women should be able to defend themselves. He made me study judo.

'Sagamore: Judo? Do you mean Hebrew?

'Epifania: Hebrew! Nonsense! Judo is what ignorant people call jujitsu. I could throw you through that window as easily as you handed me that rotten chair.

'Sagamore: Oh! Japanese wrestling. Rather a rough sport for a lady, isn't it?

'Epifania: How dare you call Judo a sport? It is a religion.'<sup>125</sup>

Later, Epifania throws people who annoy her, rather than punching or kicking them.<sup>126</sup> Shaw had a keen interest in boxing, and he even took lessons,

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<sup>122</sup> Martin Banham (ed), *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p.984; Shaw, *The Simpleton* pp.138-139.

<sup>123</sup> Examples include, Leon M. Lion, 'Shaw Breaks a Rule' *The Independent Shavian* 36:3 (1998) pp.55-56; 'Sarah Tapping Next Week' *The Eastbourne Gazette* 17 January 1949 p.3.

<sup>124</sup> Shaw, *The Simpleton* pp.138-139.

<sup>125</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Plays Extravagant: Too Good to be True, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, The Millionairess* (London and New York: Penguin Books 1981) p.253.

<sup>126</sup> For example, Shaw, *The Simpleton* p.163; Shaw, *Plays Extravagant* p.278.

however, he also attended the Budokwai annual show in 1930.<sup>127</sup> *The Dundee Courier* reported that,

‘Mr. Bernard Shaw’s well-known interest in the art of self-defence is not, it seems, confined to boxing, for he was noticed at the Stadium Club the other night in a ring-side seat, following with an expert eye the series of ju-jitsu contests between a German team ... and the Budokwai Club of London.’

Continuing with,

‘Mr. Shaw was greatly amused by an exhibition bout, “Girl v. Ruffian,” in which an athletic young woman showed us how a would-be bag snatcher should be treated.’<sup>128</sup>

Therefore, it could have been that he had already considered Epifania as a *jūdōka* when he wrote *The Millionairess* in around 1936, and his meeting with Sarah brought back an earlier notion. Epifania was a spoilt, irascible woman, and one wonders which aspects of Sarah’s personality and abilities caused Shaw’s exclamation of her suitability for the part.

The notices for Lion’s production used Sarah’s image, and her past life as a martial artist as a draw.<sup>129</sup> Here we see the use of judo not only for the promotion of a play, but also how it was used as part of the earlier promotion of fascism in Europe.

An article in the *Eastbourne Gazette* referred to her trip with Hatta Ichiro to Europe in 1935, running the title ‘How I Met the Fuhrer: Sarah Tapping Tells Her Story’.<sup>130</sup>

‘It was just before the Olympic Games ... and I was visiting Germany with a group of Japanese friends. We had lunch with the Fuhrer and we were lined up – a most objectionable sort of parading – for him to “inspect” us.’

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<sup>127</sup> For information on Shaw and pugilism see, Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: A Biography* (London: Vintage 1998) pp.62-63; Benny Green, *Shaw’s Champions: G.B.S. and Prizefighting for Cashel Byron to Gene Tunney* (London: Elm Tree Books 1978). For Shaw’s attendance at The Budokwai annual show see, ‘G.B.S. and Ju-Jitsu’ *The Dundee Courier* 12 November 1930 p.12.

<sup>128</sup> ‘G.B.S. and Ju-Jitsu’.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Sarah Tapping Next Week’ p.3.

<sup>130</sup> ‘How I Met the Fuhrer’ *The Eastbourne Herald* 20 January 1940 p.6.

She continued with,

'I do not say it because of what has happened since, but I have never met anyone I disliked so much. He was working up for one of his fits of temper and there was a look in his eyes that made me think then that here was a man who was a complete lunatic. I took an intense dislike to him and I am afraid I showed it.'<sup>131</sup>

This was clearly an attempt to ingratiate Sarah, and therefore the show, with a prospective Eastbourne audience, who, in January 1940, were likely to respond to contempt for Hitler.

34. 'How I Met the Fuhrer' *Eastbourne Herald* 20 January 1940.

No other evidence has been found for this meeting, however, there is no reason to dismiss it as complete fabrication. In the lead up to the Berlin Olympics, Germany welcomed many foreign sportsmen, including Japanese. Ricky Law states:

'Although these visits did not quite amount to sports diplomacy, they were enthusiastically covered by German newsmen, so much so that the communist and Nazi papers could even agree in welcoming judo masters from Japan.'<sup>132</sup>

Likewise, Panzer describes how the Japanese martial arts were received favourably in Germany and with the Nazi regime because they 'tapped into a

<sup>131</sup> 'How I Met the Fuhrer' p.6.

<sup>132</sup> Ricky W. Law, 'Knowledge is Power: The Interwar German and Japanese Mass Media in the Making of the Axis,' *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 54 (Spring 2014) p.30.

broader consensus that Japanese culture was ... familiar and recognisable to Germans'.<sup>133</sup>

If this meeting did take place between Sarah, Ichiro and Hitler, it places her, once again, within the complex tangle of world politics and the use of sport as propaganda during the volatile inter-war period. With the date of the alleged 'lunch' just over a year before the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan, this was a time of great flux for the world powers, and Sarah would have again found herself witnessing political manoeuvres taking place.<sup>134</sup> These alliances were well established by 1940, and Sarah's earlier positive reviews of Japanese behaviour contrasted sharply against her disparaging comments about the German Head of State in a likely attempt to encourage customers to attend her latest acting venture.

In Eastbourne however, Sarah's chance to promote judo through performance was short lived. *The Millionairess* ran for only one week between Monday 22 January and Saturday 27 January, and there were notices in three issues of *The Eastbourne Gazette*, on 17, 20 and 24 January. The third, the only one published during the run, gave a review which was careful in its praise of Sarah, but nevertheless admiring of the physicality of the role:

'Miss Tapping plays her part, awesome in length, agility and verbiage, the only fault in her acting being a tendency to become monotonous in both action and diction. But she plays it with grace and gallantry, undertaking what the majority of actresses would be inclined to shirk.'<sup>135</sup>

It is possible that Shaw, one of the foremost playwrights of the early twentieth century, witnessed Sarah's portrayal of Epifania, as he seldom let one of his shows be produced without his own involvement, and *The Eastbourne Gazette* tantalised prospective audiences with: 'Mr. Lion dropped a hint that Mr. Bernard Shaw is likely to pay the Park a visit one evening this week to see a "first

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<sup>133</sup> Sarah Panzer, 'When Jiu-Jitsu was German: Japanese Martial Arts in German Sport- and Körperkultur,' in Joanne Miyang Cho, Lee Roberts and Christian Spang (eds), *Transnational Encounters between Germany and Japan: Perceptions of Partnership in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015) p.103.

<sup>134</sup> For more information and a comprehensive overview of the German-Japanese diplomatic relationship for the period see, Ernst L. Presseisen, *Germany and Japan: A Study in Totalitarian Diplomacy 1933–1941* (Netherlands: Springer 2013).

<sup>135</sup> H. V. T., 'Bernard Shaw Play' *The Eastbourne Gazette* 24 January 1940 p.9.



performance” of his play.’<sup>136</sup> A later page of the same issue indicates that there was no future for the show at Eastbourne however, and the low audience turn out due to the sudden snowstorms and freezing temperatures, in addition to the difficulties of running a theatre in wartime, caused Lion to close The Devonshire Park.<sup>137</sup>

Shaw continued to promote both Sarah and judo through his play, as he sought to have *The Millionairess* produced in the West End, with one of his favourite leading ladies, Edith Evans (later Dame Edith), a much better-known performer than Sarah, in the role of Epifania. During the lead up to the Devonshire Park production, there were already plans in place for Evans to take the role at The Globe theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue, with a report about it in *The Stage* in January, and an agreement between Shaw and Hugh Beaumont, the producer, drawn up in February 1940, although Beaumont seemed reluctant to sign.<sup>138</sup> Shaw did, however, encourage both Beaumont and Evans to contact Sarah. A letter to Beaumont, dated March 1940, referenced the fact that The Lord Chamberlain would ‘require another guinea for the very noticeable alteration’ in text, likely to be referring to the changes from boxing to judo, as he continued with:

‘You will have to secure Sarah Benedict Tapping, 33 Nottingham Place W.1., Welbeck 4781. She is a Black Belt, which is the highest Judo dignity; and she is a qualified actress from an old theatrical family. She has played Epifania with Leon M. Lion at Eastbourne and is the only expert understudy available for Edith.’<sup>139</sup>

A letter written a few months later demonstrated Shaw’s determination to promote Sarah to the producer:

‘I have just had a talk with Sarah Tapping; and I find that she must not give private lessons in Judo for money, as she would thereby forfeit her amateur status. But she can take an engagement as producer of a scene (or a whole play: she produces for Leon M. Lion) as that, and acting, is her

<sup>136</sup> For detailed information on Shaw and his involvement with his play productions see, Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*. Quote from H. V. T., ‘Bernard Shaw Play’ p.9.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Park Theatre is Closing’ *The Eastbourne Gazette* 24 January 1940 p.14.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Chit Chat’ *The Stage* 11 January 1940 p.6; Shaw to Beaumont, Agreement, 5 February 1940.

<sup>139</sup> Shaw to Beaumont, Letter, 19 March 1940.

profession. She says she can arrange an effective show that will impose on the audience as real Judo.'

He continued with a cautionary note,

'But she has other games in hand, and may slip through our fingers unless you can give her an engagement and some notion of the date.'

He finished with an emphasis that Beaumont should 'At all events see her: I should like her to become real to you.'<sup>140</sup>

Unless Sarah was hoping to compete as an amateur, which is highly unlikely as there were no national or international amateur competitions for women at that time, it is probable that this was a way to try to procure another West End producing job. Whether Shaw was complicit or an unwitting player in this likely ruse is unknown, but by his support and association, and his change of text, he gave Sarah an important place in modern theatrical history. Dolgin describes how Shaw was inspired by the 'New Woman' for many of his plays and characters, and in Sarah, perhaps he saw this personified.<sup>141</sup>

Apart from the inherent issues with promoting a Japanese cultural form during wartime, the war created other problems for the show related to the lack of men who had the skills needed for the judo scenes. A note at the end of a letter from Shaw to Beaumont said there were difficulties in casting the men, as 'both Toyne and Stephen Murray [were] called up'.<sup>142</sup> Gabriel Toyne, who was a fencer, had played in Lion's production and was clearly also being suggested by Shaw for the West End.<sup>143</sup> But the war was to have an even greater effect on the show, as Conolly states, 'Edith Evans finally agreed to play the part in a provincial tour in anticipation of a West End opening in September 1940, but the production was cancelled because of the Blitz.'<sup>144</sup> A fact corroborated by Dan H.

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<sup>140</sup> Shaw to Beaumont, Letter, 9 May 1940.

<sup>141</sup> Ellen E. Dolgin, *Shaw and the Actresses' Franchise League: Staging Equality* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company 2015) p.182.

<sup>142</sup> Shaw to Beaumont, Letter, 9 May 1940.

<sup>143</sup> 'Politeness Crashes Mayfair: And it's All Because of Gabriel's Sword' *The Daily Mirror* 5 December 1935 p.11.

<sup>144</sup> L. W. Conolly, *Bernard Shaw and the BBC* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press 2009) p.120.

Laurence in his edition of Shaw's selected correspondence.<sup>145</sup> There has been no further evidence found of Sarah's actual involvement in the West End production, and it is possible that she was never contacted by Beaumont or Evans.

There is no further evidence of Sarah's involvement with judo during the war, but we can still see the influence it had over her and the celebrity which it created through the reactions of others towards her. Sarah continued to work with Lion through the early period of the war, and in August and September 1940, just when *The Millionairess* should have been opening at The Globe, Sarah was to be found as a supporting actor in his production of *While Parents Sleep*, touring from Edinburgh to Bath.<sup>146</sup> Lion, Sarah and Iris Baker, the lead in *While Parents Sleep* were to be found staying together at Pratts Hotel in Bath during the tour in the 'Bath Visitors' List'.<sup>147</sup> None of the other actors in the show appear in the list in either the larger or smaller hotels, indicating that Sarah was still an important part of Lion's enterprise, or a very close friend.

Back in London, the pair were to be seen about town visiting Clifford Bax, poet, author and playwright, who referred to Lion and Sarah as Shavians:

'During a heavy air-raid on the West End, Leon and Miss Sarah Tapping arrived at my rooms. Miss Tapping had not only attained the Black Belt, a high honour, in a Japanese school of Judo or Ju-jutsu, but on that account, had played the leading part in one of Shaw's plays.'<sup>148</sup>

Bax lived in a prestigious set of apartments in Piccadilly.<sup>149</sup> He went on to relate that in order to distract his guests from the dramatic 'bombing and counter-cannonade' outside, he produced letters in his possession from Shaw to one of his mistresses; actress Florence Farr.<sup>150</sup> Sarah apparently 'insisted' that either she or Bax 'get Bernard Shaw's permission to publish the letters'. With this interest in publishing Shaw's correspondence, we see Sarah once again

<sup>145</sup> Dan H. Laurence (ed), *Selected Correspondence of Bernard Shaw: Theatrics, 1889-1950* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press 1995) p.205.

<sup>146</sup> 'Kingston Empire' *Surrey Advertiser* 24 August 1940 p.6; 'The Empire' *The Scotsman* 3 September 1940 p.7; 'Theatre Royal, Bath' *Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald* 7 September 1940 p.7.

<sup>147</sup> 'Bath Visitors' List' *Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald* 14 September 1940 p.12.

<sup>148</sup> Clifford Bax, *Some I Knew Well* (London: Phoenix House 1951) p.159.

<sup>149</sup> Clifford Bax, *An Evening in Albany* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode 1942) p.1.

<sup>150</sup> Bax, *Some I Knew Well* p.159.

connected to The Literati and seeking an entrepreneurial role in theatrical terms. Bax stated that he approached Shaw about 'Miss Tapping's proposal', but Shaw refused to admit the existence of the letters, so another of Sarah's ventures had failed before it had even begun.<sup>151</sup>

These important members of the modern theatre movement give the thesis yet another social incarnation for Sarah, as we see her become involved with the theatre elite. Bax was also part of a social set of artists, playwrights and poets.<sup>152</sup> His great friend Meum Stewart (Dorothy Lindsell-Stewart) was the long-term lover of Jacob Epstein, the sculptor, who was in turn connected to Augustus John. This rather neatly brings Sarah's social sphere full circle from the 1920s, as we recall her early time at the Budokwai, and the women such as Ethel Nettleship, the sister-in-law of Augustus John, with whom she may have trained.

Although somewhat out of the scope of this thesis, wartime records have briefly been investigated to determine whether Sarah continued to show a patriotic loyalty, or whether she maintained her support of Japan and an interest in judo. This period also holds the key to understanding her demise in the public consciousness. In October 1940, Sarah's brother Tom, who was working as an advertising agent, died aged forty-one from cancer of the oesophagus, a year and a half after the death of their mother.<sup>153</sup> There have been no records found of Sarah relating to 1941, unless, of course, the visit to Clifford Bax was during the Blitz in that year, but for 1942, an entry was found in *The Newcastle Evening Chronicle* titled 'Thriller for Women War Workers'.<sup>154</sup> In the article, Lion was promoting a show in which he was performing at the Theatre Royal in Newcastle, but was showing his patriotic diligence by entertaining 'women war workers' employed at a North-East factory. An added note quoted him as saying 'The factory supervisor of entertainment, Miss Sarah Tapping, was the well-known author of many West End plays and ... she had introduced at the factory

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<sup>151</sup> Bax, *Some I knew Well* p.159.

<sup>152</sup> Clifford Bax Papers, Correspondence from Bax to Leon M. Lion, 1 August 1940, Rare Books Collection, University of Rochester, U.S.A.

<sup>153</sup> Death Certificate, Thomas Alfred Tapping, St. Marylebone, 19 October 1941, G.R.O.

<sup>154</sup> 'Thriller for Women War Workers' *The Newcastle Evening Chronicle* 6 May 1942 p.8.

her own broadcast station'.<sup>155</sup> A slight exaggeration, as she is only known to have written one West End play, however, this conclusively places her in the North-East of England at a factory carrying out 'war work' in May 1942, five months after Japan had joined the fray of the Second World war.

No evidence has been found through The Imperial War Museum, Tyne and Wear Archives, or The National Archives, of which factory might have employed Sarah. The nature of the secrecy surrounding factories contributing to the war effort at the time may have some bearing on this. However, a small amount of information on ordnance work in the Second World War has been gathered in more recent years. For example, the Royal Ordnance Factory (R.O.F.) in Aycliffe, County Durham, which employed several thousand workers, mostly women, has become known for having provided top class entertainment for the staff.<sup>156</sup> There are over sixty recordings, held at the Imperial War Museum, of workers at R.O.F. Aycliffe talking about their experiences. Having checked the transcripts through the U.K. Data Service, many speak of the factory radio station and how they were entertained, although none mention Lion, or Sarah.<sup>157</sup> So, although it has not been possible to locate the specific place of work for Sarah, with her experience as a producer, she had become part of a wider, patriotic attempt to build the morale of workers during the unpleasant and often dangerous working conditions they endured, with theatrical and musical distractions.

This is the last record found of Sarah's whereabouts during the Second World War. There have, however, been two references found which indicate a continued interest in her judo prowess during wartime. The first, in the newspaper *Good Morning*, in a section called 'Odd Corner' in 1943, recalled Sarah's black belt achievement:

'Mrs. Sarah Mayer who was giving exhibitions in the art of judo (or ju jitsu) in 1935, is the only English woman to have been awarded the coveted black belt by Japan. Dainty and feminine to a degree, Mrs. Mayer showed

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<sup>155</sup> 'Thriller for Women War Workers'.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Brown, *Women Wartime Workers at Aycliffe Royal Ordnance Factory*, Sound Recordings, (1988) 19686-19752, accessed through The Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>157</sup> R. K. Brown, *Women Workers in the Aycliffe Royal Ordnance Factory during World War Two, 1939-1945*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 5515. (2014) <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5515-2>

that she could throw strong men about like dolls. She was actually awarded the black belt in the men's championships!'<sup>158</sup>

There seems to have been no catalyst for this piece, other than the 'odd' nature of a past event.

The second reference found was an aside in one of Shaw's letters to Lion in April 1944, when he asked, 'How is your friend the judo champion?'<sup>159</sup> This shows a continued interest in Sarah by Shaw, and an indication of his perception of her as a *jūdoka* but not necessarily an enduring friendship where they corresponded directly.

Sarah began the war period as a recently divorced actress, and producer on the West End stage, writing articles supporting the Japanese position in the national press, and being promoted by George Bernard Shaw. However, she was called to action, far from her London and Hampshire homes, and immersed into a world of secrecy and serious work, although still related to her field of entertainment. Her knowledge of French from her school days in Belgium, and the Japanese language, were perhaps not strong enough to have been utilised by the British authorities, for example, a search of the HS9 Special Operations Executive agents records at The National Archives, showed no sign of Sarah.<sup>160</sup> Conversely, her love for the Japanese did not stop her from supporting the British cause with her volunteer work as part of civil defence, and her likely conscription to the North East of England put her in direct opposition to the country she had supported against received opinion just two or three years earlier.

As the war drew to a close, ten years after her journey home from Japan, and Sarah attempted to return to her previous life, the records find her once again in London and with a new social group.

## 5.6 Warwick and the Caravan 1945-1957

To conclude this chronological biography, it is essential for this work to include the final years of Sarah's life. Having investigated the construction of this female

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<sup>158</sup> 'Odd Corner' *Good Morning* 9 September 1943 p.2.

<sup>159</sup> Lion, *Surprise of my Life* p.143.

<sup>160</sup> Ministry of Economic Warfare, Special Operations Executive 1940-1945, HS9, T.N.A.

role model for judo in the early twentieth century, we must also consider her demise and subsequent fade to obscurity within the historiography.

In 1945, Sarah began to live with a man named Warwick Parker John Ovington. At the beginning of the war, on 19 September 1939, Warwick had held an RAF appointment with the Administrative and Special Duties Branch.<sup>161</sup> He was essentially a clerk or accountant, who had been schooled at Dulwich College, a prestigious independent school on the outskirts of London.<sup>162</sup> The son of James Middleton Sutherland, a bank manager in the Isle of Man, and Ethel Parker, his parents divorced, and at the age of twenty he took the surname of his step-father, Spenser Ovington, by deed poll.<sup>163</sup> Warwick had served with the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War, and a passenger list from 1923 shows that he spent part of the inter-war years living in Ceylon.<sup>164</sup> He then spent some time in Canada, crossing the border into the United States of America in January 1925 on a temporary visa.<sup>165</sup> He was two years younger than Sarah.

Despite comprehensive searches of both local and national archives, there has been very little documentation found in public records of Sarah's association with Warwick. Equally, the search for source material for Sarah's later life has produced fragmentary evidence. Renders et al show the difficulties of the 'gap in the narrative' although they assert that 'gaps in knowledge are no less important than sources which describe a certain course of events.'<sup>166</sup> The main source of information for this section comes, initially, from Sarah's own change of name by deed poll, and from her inquest papers.<sup>167</sup> Electoral registers show that in 1946, Sarah and Warwick were living at 166 Camden Road, London

<sup>161</sup> 'RAF Appointments' *Scotsman* 27 September 1939 p.13.

<sup>162</sup> T. L. Ormiston, *Dulwich College Register 1619-1926* (London: Dulwich College 1927) p.491.

<sup>163</sup> Warwick Parker Sutherland, Isle of Man Select Births and Baptisms, 9 November 1898, Douglas, Isle of Man, FHL Film Number: 454961 [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed September 2018); 'Warwick Parker Sutherland' *London Gazette* 15 April 1919 p.4934.

<sup>164</sup> Air Ministry, Records of the Department of the Master General of Personnel and the Air Member for Personnel, 1918-1919, Warwick Parker John Sutherland, 76/383/221, T.N.A.; Orsova, London, Arrival 14 August 1923, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed August 2018)

<sup>165</sup> Border crossing; Manhattan, Plymouth, Arrival 16 October 1934, UK Incoming Passenger Lists [online] [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (accessed September 2018); Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, London, England, Spenser Ovington, Queens Gate Ward, 1934, LCC/PER, L.M.A.

<sup>166</sup> Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds), *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (London and New York: Routledge 2017) p.47.

<sup>167</sup> Supreme Court of Judicature and former Courts of Common Law, Deed Polls, J18, T.N.A.

NW1.<sup>168</sup> This was an early twentieth-century semi-detached house. Listed in the electoral registers were three other people living there at the same time as Warwick and Sarah, two women and one man, all with different surnames.<sup>169</sup> A look at the 1939 register for the same address revealed the same three people, John Young Harris, a textile despatcher, Mary Edith Bevan, a housekeeper, and Lilian A. Dykes, a domestic help.<sup>170</sup> Perhaps John Harris let out a room to Warwick and Sarah as lodgers? The couple were not on the electoral registers at the Camden Road address in 1947, and there has been no information found on the couple from that date until January 1951 when Sarah changed her name by deed poll to Sarah Benedict Ovington.<sup>171</sup>

This was presumably to afford some image of decency as the couple were living together, or perhaps it was in lieu of a marriage, as were she to marry, the alimony payments from Robert may have ceased.

Sarah's address on the deed poll notice for 13 January 1951 in *The London Gazette* was 'The Caravan, 62 Church Road, Rolleston-on-Dove, Staffordshire', and she had used a local solicitor's firm from the nearby town of Burton-upon-Trent to facilitate the change of name. The address was a farm cottage, and it would seem that Warwick and Sarah were living in a caravan in the grounds of the farm. How Sarah had fallen from the heights of owning a country estate to living in a temporary home nearly a hundred and fifty miles from her own city is unknown, but we must consider the possibilities. Obviously, the divorce had removed her from the considerable source of wealth that came with being married to Robert, although he was still supporting her with the agreed amount from fifteen years before. In 1946, at the same time as Sarah disappeared from public record, Leon M. Lion died, leaving Sarah bereft of not only a friend, but a source of theatrical income and connection.<sup>172</sup> The wholesale bombing of London had created a shortage of homes, and it is conceivable that the couple had a connection with the village of Rolleston-on-Dove, although none has been

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<sup>168</sup> Electoral Registration Officer, Electoral Registers, London, England, Warwick P. J. Ovington, St Pancras, South East Division, Ward No.3, 1946, LCC/PER, L.M.A.

<sup>169</sup> Electoral Registers, Warwick P. J. Ovington, 1946.

<sup>170</sup> Registrar General, John Young Harris, 1939 Register, St Pancras, RG101/0479E/005/28, Schedule number 70, T.N.A. [digital only].

<sup>171</sup> 'Notices' *London Gazette* 16 January 1951 Supplement 39124 p.326.

<sup>172</sup> Death Register Index, Leon Marks Lion, Brighton, 1947, 5h:133, G.R.O.



found. Warwick was working as a civil servant, but it is in the Inquest Papers from Sarah's death in 1957, just six years after her name change, that we get a clue as to one of the possible reasons for the downward trend in the couple's living conditions.

Although the post-mortem examination report described her as a 'well nourished, muscular female' the document stated that Sarah had been seeing a 'Dr Russian from Barton-under-Needwood, for chronic alcoholism'.<sup>173</sup> Warwick's statement reveals that she had visited Burton-on-Trent General Hospital in June for about a month for 'observation', and for two weeks in November. Dr Antonio de la Concepcion Russian was not a specialist, but a village G.P.<sup>174</sup> Sarah was attending his surgery once a fortnight to pick up her prescription for Pheno Barbitone.<sup>175</sup> This work will not attempt to research into the causation or effects of alcoholism, or the effectiveness of certain treatments, but it is likely that the more Sarah was affected by her addiction, the more difficult it would have become to function as a healthy individual. This may go some way to explaining the demise of her social interaction and vocational output. Julie Holledge discusses the difficulties of divorce and drinking among the acting profession, quoting successful actress and manager Lena Ashwell, who had married a man with an alcohol addiction: 'There is no doubt that in my misery and despair, I might have taken to drink, like many other women condemned to a life of torture and desperation.'<sup>176</sup>

Other women involved with sport and leisure in the early twentieth century were known to have been affected by similar issues, some of whom show distinct parallels with Mayer's story. A contemporary of Mayer, the athlete and aviator, Sophie Peirce-Evans, who rose in social status to become Lady Heath, has received more attention in the academic literature. Although the two cases show similarities, Peirce-Evans had been born into a wealthy Anglo-Irish family.<sup>177</sup> Despite the fact that Lady Heath undoubtedly experienced social mobility, and

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<sup>173</sup> Coroner's report for Sarah Benedict Ovington, 21 March 1957, County Borough of Burton-upon-Trent, [author's own collection].

<sup>174</sup> 'The Fabric of the School' [online] [www.bartonhistory.co.uk](http://www.bartonhistory.co.uk) (accessed October 2018).

<sup>175</sup> Coroner's report for Sarah Benedict Ovington.

<sup>176</sup> Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press 1981) p.17.

<sup>177</sup> Jean Williams, *A Contemporary History of Women's Sport, Part One: Sporting Women, 1850-1960* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) p. 389.

had an international reputation in the 1920s as one of the most famous women of her time, she, like Mayer, also developed an alcohol problem which led to her early death in 1939, at the young age of forty-two.<sup>178</sup> Heath left a legacy for commercial flying quite beyond her enthusiasm for athletics and sport. Mayer's rise in social standing was more dramatic although her fame as a *jūdoka* was far more short-lived.

The tragic nature of Sarah's life continued as her younger brother Charles was the victim of a fatal car accident in 1955 while working as a chauffeur.<sup>179</sup> He was driving a visiting American couple around the country and was on the A15 in Lincolnshire when a car pulled out of a side turning into his path. He was killed as he swerved to avoid the other car and hit a telegraph pole.<sup>180</sup> This left Sarah with no immediate family. Spenser, Warwick's stepfather also died in January 1956 leaving effects of £2,548 to his wife Ethel, and the electoral registers show that sometime between 1956 and 1957, Warwick and Sarah moved out of the caravan and into a flat at The Knowle in nearby Barton-under-Needwood where her doctor was situated. But it was shortly after this move that, following an evening of heavy drinking, Sarah awoke in the morning and collapsed, dying shortly afterwards in hospital on 19 March 1957. The inquest verdict was 'Misadventure'.<sup>181</sup>

## 5.7 Chapter Five: Conclusions

The end of Sarah's life contrasts sharply with the positivity of her ground-breaking achievement and her physical strength and wellbeing as she left Japan just over twenty years before. However, despite her later difficulties, these years witness her attempts to promulgate the art of judo in Britain and mainland Europe and encourage women in Britain to learn self-defence techniques protecting them from attack. In the year leading up to the Second World War, Sarah's career developed with the West End production of a play she had written, also shown on the new medium of television; and a role as

<sup>178</sup> Mark Pottle, Heath [née Peirce-Evans; other married name Elliott-Lynn], Sophie Catherine Theresa Mary, Lady Heath (1896–1939) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004) <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-67141> (accessed 12 January 2020).

<sup>179</sup> Death Certificate, Charles Benedict Tapping, North Kesteven, 27 August 1955, G.R.O.

<sup>180</sup> 'High Speeds Defended by Coroner' *The Lincolnshire Echo* 30 August 1955, np.

<sup>181</sup> Coroner's report for Sarah Benedict Ovington.

leading lady, for one of the top producers of the day, endorsed by one of the premier playwrights. Her professional life, following her second divorce, saw her as a female producer and director on the West End stage, and placed her back into a theatrical social sphere, mixing with, and even influencing to a degree, renowned and important members of the community.

A series of disappointments, both in her family and working life in the lead up to the Second World War, perhaps gave her a continued and more closely held affection for Japan and its people, despite this being at odds with wider public opinion. However, her record of public service through the war showed a patriotic support for Britain. Having volunteered for service, her later, likely conscripted, work in the North East of England, although separating her from her developing social circle, at an already uncertain and dynamic juncture following her divorce, revealed a successful utilisation of her theatrical production skills on the home front in wartime Britain. However, it was at this point in her life that she seems to have left her interest in judo and Japan behind, conforming to national sensibilities during the Second World War. Her subsequent illness held a social stigma, and was, in addition to anti-Japanese feeling in Britain, likely to be the reason for her decline and lack of recognition through British sporting history.

## Conclusions

As the first full biographical Ph.D. thesis on a British female judo pioneer, this work has revealed a complicated era in transnational sporting history. The political machinations of the inter-war period have here been directly connected to the Japanese martial arts, not only from a British perspective, but more significantly, through the use of a Western woman in Japanese propaganda. This thesis highlights for the first time, a British woman becoming proficient at a Japanese sport, in Japan, and the resultant international publicity, during such an important and challenging period for the two countries.

The thesis argues that judo, as both a sport and a collection of philosophical ideals, was part of a much wider endeavour to internationalise Japanese sport, and more importantly the globalisation of Japan itself, and the work places Sarah Mayer briefly at the centre of that struggle.

The first and broadest question this thesis has attempted to answer is, quite simply, who was Sarah Mayer? One of the key aspects of this thesis has been to nuance the interpretation of social class and gender in judo's diverse history. As Brian Goodger discovered back in 1981, the consensus was that British judo players in the first half of the twentieth century came from 'upper class' origins.<sup>1</sup> The research for this thesis, based specifically on Sarah Mayer, but also including other women who joined the Budokwai in London in the 1920s, has shown that this was undoubtedly true in many cases. However, it has been difficult to classify Mayer's place in the social strata of the period, and that is partly because of the diverse and complicated backgrounds of families within the theatre, so ably described by Tracy C. Davis.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, building on Goodger's work, the thesis contends that gendered social mobility and the ways in which women's socio-economic circumstances might change, must impact on their social standing. Mayer's case has been shown to be highly complex, hence the need for detailed individual biographies of women such as she.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Goodger, 'The Development of Judo in Britain: A Sociological Study,' (Thesis for Ph.D., University of London, 1981) pp.97-101.

<sup>2</sup> Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge 1991) p.3.

In the first instance, the work considered Mayer's origins. Utilising genealogical techniques, the research first determined that she had an inauspicious start as the illegitimate child of mid-scale working actors. Her father was embroiled in the historic family system of the theatre, married to a woman from an important stage dynasty, and himself the son of an actor-comedian. Her mother's background was perhaps even less salubrious, having left her family's public house where she was working as a barmaid and turned to acting. These people were not held in particularly high esteem within society, and female actors had traditionally been thought of as little more than prostitutes,<sup>3</sup> although by the time of Mayer's birth, there was a certain legitimacy in being from an acting family.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, if we take this evidence alone, it would appear that this particular woman, practising judo in the early twentieth century was definitely not born into 'high society'. But the traditional link between the upper classes and the theatre, in addition to the social ambiguity that can accompany celebrity in all its forms, may have given Mayer a platform to attract a wealthy husband. This is supported by the fact that she married 'well' twice.

Although her first marriage ended almost as soon as it had begun, it was the real start of her social climb. As her husband had attended Harrow School with future world leaders, she was placed into a very different socio-economic environment. There is no doubt that the failure of the marriage, alongside the public court case brought by her new mother-in-law against her, plus her husband's bankruptcy, would have damaged her reputation. However, the gain in social standing perhaps outweighed the disastrous outcome. Mayer's ability to re-emerge from the marriage as a successful business woman, albeit briefly, and still in the theatre, speaks of her resilience and strength of character, both attributes which were very much in evidence in her later pioneering endeavour.

This entrepreneurial stage of her life as a touring theatre manager drew upon her capacity to function as a woman in a patriarchal profession. The position saw her as superordinate to the men in her employ. If we take this in addition to

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<sup>3</sup> Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses and Prostitutes in Victorian London*, *Theatre Research International*, 13:3 (1988) pp.221-234.

<sup>4</sup> Viv Gardner, 'The Three Nobodys,' in Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (eds), *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2004) p.17.

the need to do business with (mostly male) theatre managers around the country, we see a woman who had developed some self-assurance when dealing with male contemporaries, and this became a key aspect of her trip to Japan.

The continuation of Mayer's increased social standing through the 1920s was evident through her marriage to another Harrow School alumnus, the son of a wealthy diamond merchant. This union was a little more successful than the first and the relationship had lasted for eleven years before she left for Japan. However, with her absence from the family home and her husband's desertion on her return, the evidence suggests that this was not a happy marriage by the end, and that subsequently, through divorce, her socio-economic status returned to its former position.

The thesis has shown that Mayer's two marriages lifted her standing in society considerably, and at the time of her trip to Japan, she would have been seen as a member of the upper classes. Thus, the work reveals the contrast between Mayer's status through her childhood, and her life as a young adult socialite. Despite this, the thesis has shown how this juxtaposition between her profession and perceived social standing impacted on her ability to assimilate into the Japanese judo world, and that this complex background gave her the confidence to defy convention, choosing to train exclusively with men, and becoming the first woman to be permitted to do so at the foundational home of judo, the Kōdōkan. With this knowledge, we begin to answer the questions asking how and why Sarah Mayer was in this unprecedented position.

This thesis places Mayer as an important figure, alongside her contemporaries, as feminists and sporting pioneers, from a range of backgrounds and with different life courses. Women such as suffrage supporter and *jūjutsuka* Edith Garrud, and aviator Sophie Peirce-Evans (Lady Heath). There is no evidence so far that the two women ever met, but Mayer could well have empathised with Heath's witticism 'A woman's place is in the home, but failing that the aerodrome';<sup>5</sup> although in her case, of course, it would be the *dōjō*. Mary, Duchess of Bedford, who was also an aviator and social climber, became

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<sup>5</sup> Chris Hopkins, *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History* (London: Bloomsbury 2006) p. 40.

involved with early British women's judo, lending her name as a supporter to Emily Watts' publication *The Fine Art of Jujutsu*, considered to be the first book on judo technique by a woman in the English language.<sup>6</sup> From a Japanese perspective, we can also see, through the example of Hitomi Kinue, a successful track and field athlete of the inter-war period, a Japanese sportswoman engaging in a western sport.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the thesis has presented several examples of pioneering female internationalists who Mayer could look up to, and with whom she may have identified.

The thesis has provided a comprehensive answer to the question of Sarah Mayer's identity and social standing amongst her peers, and yet, because of the fragmented and incomplete nature of the source material, there are aspects of her life that still elude even the most far-reaching research conducted over a decade. So, while the conclusions to this thesis provide important milestones in the compilation of her biography, there are definitive aspects of her life, such as her motivations at important junctures in her life, that remain unknown. This is in no small part due to the lack of autobiographical evidence, other than the short series of seven letters from Mayer to Gunji Koizumi at the Budokwai, and a few relevant articles written by Mayer, found to this date. Through the process of the collection of cumulative evidence, an interpretation of Mayer's actions at these points has been made, albeit open to revision as new sources inevitably come to light as part of the post-Doctoral research agenda.

One of the questions that the thesis has raised is the extent to which Mayer regarded her Japanese trip as a form of leisure and tourism, compared with an extended form of performance where she sought to increase her own fame by travelling overseas as a sporting pioneer. In spite of access to the set of letters, the first of which was sent *en route* from India, and the remainder from Japan itself, it has been difficult to assess the main reasons for Mayer to leave the comfortable family home, alone, to undertake this journey. However, what the thesis has been able to do, is analyse the conglomeration of contributing factors which are likely to have influenced this seemingly ill-timed trip across warring China and Tibet to Japan, a nation of building nationalism and fascism, where

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<sup>6</sup> Mrs Roger Watts, *The Fine Art of Jujutsu* (London: Heinemann, 1906).

<sup>7</sup> Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2001)

the Anglo-Japanese relationship was strained at best, and where The West was increasingly becoming the enemy. Through analysis of the autobiographical and other contextual material, cumulative plausibility enables the following interpretation.

When Mayer joined the Budokwai in London she had become part of the nation's drive for fitness, and through both her earlier professional career and her interest in judo, she was linked with some of the key feminist thinkers of her day, who saw self-defence as vital to their work. Her choice of recreation has also been found to be related to an interest in Japan, and her decision to participate in a sport or art form aimed at developing the body and mind, came at a time when the British establishment was encouraging the population to improve their health through physical culture.<sup>8</sup> Mayer's personal circumstances within her second marriage have been shown to be difficult, certainly by the time of her return from the trip. It is also clear from the sources related to her first marriage, that she was not afraid to leave an unhappy situation, even if it affected her reputation. Mayer's comments in her letter from India, regarding how the improved muscle strength from travelling on an elephant would help with her forthcoming training, indicate that she not only saw the trip as a holiday, but was also planning to improve her judo skills at the home of the sport. The thesis thus demonstrates that it is likely that her initial motivation was as an unhappy woman, seeking to broaden her horizons, and indulge in her personal interests, as a sports tourist, along with a developing feminist consciousness.

In a similar vein, the theme of bravery against naïveté which appears throughout the thesis, arises in relation to the motivational aspects of the trip. Again, an amalgamation of the source material defines her as a woman unintimidated by a patriarchal society and determined to reach her own goals, be they professional or personal. As a young woman, her choice to work with prominent members of the suffrage movement, may have been simply a means of employment, and was undoubtedly influenced by her father's connections, but it nonetheless gave her access to a politicised view of the struggle for

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<sup>8</sup> See, Petra Rau, *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans, 1890-1950* (Farnham: Ashgate 2009); Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010) p.278.



equality. Likewise, although her use of judo as a leisure pursuit initially demonstrates an interest in Japanese culture, it also relates to the female fight for suffrage, through the *jūjutsu* 'bodyguard' written about by Godfrey.<sup>9</sup> Full enfranchisement for women was not attained until two years after Mayer began her own judo training in London, but significantly, came before her pioneering adventure. That milestone gave self-consciously 'feminist' women like Mayer, the confidence to strive for goals which previously would have seemed unreachable, as they could begin to see women, at least in some respects, on an equal footing to men.

The most significant aspect of the thesis however, which has developed through the research process, sought to determine whether Mayer's ground-breaking achievements once in Japan were through her own agency, or due to the manipulation of wider forces, related to the politicisation of sport. There are two factors which the thesis has concentrated on, both of which relate to her gendered experience. The first was that she was treated in an unprecedented manner as a woman at the Kōdōkan, being not only allowed, but actively encouraged to train with the men. The second was the fact that she was the first Western woman to be awarded shōdan by the Butokukai.

These factors have also been approached within the work in a twofold manner. Firstly, the thesis considered Mayer's own attitude and agency. Along with her financially 'successful' marriages, her professional background gave her the social confidence to be able to insist on training with men only. It is likely that the physicality of her profession between the genders allowed for her comfort in the intimate nature of fighting men. Judo is very much a contact sport, and a woman without her background in that period may have found such intimacy intimidating or uncomfortable. Was Mayer always in performance mode, utilising her professional skills, and how was that situated in relation to a complex cultural situation? Acting, and the process of rehearsal and performance, must have given Mayer the necessary physical and psychological confidence to enact a ritualistic and athletic show for public consumption in such an alien environment. The gendered norm within Japanese judo was flouted in the case

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<sup>9</sup> Emelyne Godfrey, 'The Rise of the Jujitsu-Suffragettes: Martial Arts in Fin-de-Siècle Great Britain,' (paper presented at Asia House for the Bagri Foundation, 19 May 2016).

of Mayer, and this is, in no small part, due to this unconventional background and her 'otherness'. Research exploring the connections between sport and other industries, such as the theatre, could benefit from the findings of this thesis as we see important continuities in how individuals were able to move between contexts, and international cultural differences.

Besides Mayer's own actions, the thesis has determined that her unusual gendered experience was also influenced by her introduction to Japanese judo in Kōbe, and the lack of female *jūdoka* there, forcing her to train with the local police force, and building a comfortable relationship with her teacher, Yamamoto Masanobu. This implies that there was some serendipity involved within this cultural exchange as well as pragmatism and personal agency. An analysis of Mayer's ambition for judo success has also revealed contradictions and ambivalences. Her letters do show a keenness to train from the very beginning, but there is never a mention of black belt aspiration, or a need to be unconventional, although she does present an awareness of her exceptional treatment.

Secondly, the thesis has considered the motivations of the Japanese authorities in providing Mayer with unusually generous treatment, both as part of the judo community, and as a governmental strategy. The thesis has shown that, despite the political difficulties between the two countries, far from being treated in a hostile manner, the establishment took in this British woman, travelling without her husband, and treated her with courtesy and kindness (notwithstanding dislocating her shoulder, and generally beating her on a daily basis, all in the name of judo). This is not surprising when looked at in relation to the national strategy for tourism at that time, however, the evidence does show a somewhat remarkable encouragement of her ambition and unconventionality. Through research of Kanō's lectures and the writings of Fukuda, it was found that her supposed position in society was likely to have contributed to the judo establishment's willingness to use her as a role model. Also, many of the Japanese and international press clippings which have been found, stated that Mayer was the wife of 'an English army officer', as part of the headline. The research for this thesis shows that although Robert Mayer had been a second lieutenant during the First World War, and was involved with the Territorial

division, at this point in time this was not his primary career, and he might better have been described as a businessman, although an extremely wealthy one. Therefore, this indicates the social positioning and connections with which Mayer was being labelled. Social class and respectability were clearly important elements in Mayer's experience of exceptionalism in Japan.

Additionally, Kanō's interests in both internationalism and women's judo have been well documented, and these are significant contributing factors towards her treatment in Japan. Frühstück and Manzenreiter consider that the 'territorialization of Japanese judo culture' across the world began in 1887 with Kanō's first trip abroad to promote his new form.<sup>10</sup> By encouraging Mayer's unusual ambition and using her as an example and a role model for Japanese women in judo, we see an attempt to foster international relations, as his campaign, as the first Asian member of the Olympic Committee, for the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, gained momentum. We could also interpret Kanō's permission for Mayer to practise with the men, as the first steps towards men and women training together at the Kōdōkan in the same *dōjō*. Although, as Guérandel and Mennesson demonstrate, the male/female interaction of masculine domination through 'special' treatment of women or girls continues to this day, despite mixed gender practice becoming more prevalent.<sup>11</sup> This thesis therefore enables a more nuanced discussion of how sport came to be diffused within national contexts and international networks, and how gender played an important part in these processes. The literature regarding mixed sport, and male-coached women's sport remains in the minority, and this thesis provides a crucial Anglo-Asian inter-war example.

The evidence has also shown the use of Sarah Mayer's story and image as part of the politicised promotion of Japan, related not only to tourism, but the increasing rift between Japan and the West through the Second Sino-Japanese War. It was the Butokukai, a militaristic educational organisation, which ultimately gave Mayer her black belt, although no evidence has been found to

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<sup>10</sup> Sabine Frühstück and Wolfram Manzenreiter, 'Neverland Lost: Judo Cultures in Austria, Japan, and elsewhere struggling for Cultural Hegemony at the Vienna Budokan' in Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Anguis (eds), *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese Presence in Asia, Europe, and America* (London and New York: Routledge 2001) pp.71-76.

<sup>11</sup> Carine Guérandel and Christine Mennesson, 'Gender Construction in Judo Interactions,' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 42:2 (2007): pp.167-186.

suggest that Isogai Hajime, who was ultimately responsible for the award was coerced in any way to do so by higher authorities.

The research has shown that following her award, the particular choice of government official who was photographed practising with Mayer in international press reports, holds the key to the state involvement in her achievement. Uchida Shinya, the minister for tourism and railways, was known for his innovative strategies for promoting Japan abroad. Also, like Kanō, as a prominent *jūdoka*, he would have found Mayer's interest in judo irresistible, and would have wanted to promote the 'modernity' and internationalism of Japan through images of this foreign woman participating in their national sporting culture. Clearly, Mayer's own attitude and demeanour were contributing factors here, and her image as a 'modern girl' wearing fashionable western clothing made her the perfect foil. As Barbara Sato shows, the period saw that image heavily utilised for commercial exploitation within Japan.<sup>12</sup> However, the thesis concludes that the chosen pose, with Mayer being defeated by a stranglehold from Uchida was not accidental, and was sending a figurative message through to Japan's international adversaries, of the power of the increasingly nationalistic and fascist regime. In one sense the photographs symbolise how self-defence could also mean victory over important Western visitors, both metaphorically and physically.

The work has also considered the legacy of Mayer's trip within the political arena. As another global war approached, with the complete deterioration of the Anglo-Japanese relationship and the increasingly militaristic government in Japan, the research has shown that Mayer was back in Britain, promoting Japanese culture through a right-wing publication. The incident to which she referred within the article was a highly aggressive stance on the Japanese part, tantamount to provocation towards war, the implications of which Mayer was seemingly unaware. However, the evidence reveals that this is juxtaposed against her position throughout the period, of patriotic support on the home front.

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2003) p.9.

On her return to England, and with her almost immediate trip to mainland Europe to promote her sport, Mayer's continued engagement in the development of judo, demonstrates a degree of sincerity in helping to encourage judo for women, and to promulgate the art internationally. This research supports the theory that Kanō saw her as a valuable ally and her attempts to spread the idea of judo for women throughout Europe, as well as in Britain, demonstrate that his encouragement of her ambition was a shrewd investment in the use of his senior coaches' time. Her articles in a popular British newspaper on self-defence, specifically aimed at women against male attack, and her offer of personal help to readers, also perhaps, show a genuine will to positively affect and protect women's place in society through judo, referencing the earlier gendered politicisation of the art in Britain through women such as Edith Garrud.

The thesis has shown how Mayer, despite her clear enthusiasm and work ethic regarding her training, was partly manipulated by wider political forces, to become a role model for women in judo. The brevity of her legacy, however, was partly due to the unpopularity of her pro-Japanese stance in Britain which, in turn, points to the global politicisation of sport, and specifically judo during the inter-war period. This thesis reveals how the story of a woman who became an unwitting sporting pioneer can demonstrate the cultural significance of sport in society. Mayer's influence both on and by the Japanese establishment helped to disseminate judo for women not only in Japan but also in her homeland, Britain, and across Europe, showing a determined linking of the cultures within the sporting community.

In the inter-war period in Japan, with foreign influence, and the *Modan Gāru* phenomena, Mayer was both witness to, and agent in, changing attitudes to women away from the traditional wife and mother convention which had prevailed since the feudal system, promoting a physical culture based on the ancient Samurai fighting traditions, and investigated more recently by historians such as Ikeda and Koishihara.<sup>13</sup> The thesis therefore contributes to the

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<sup>13</sup> Keiko Ikeda, 'From *Ryōsai-Kembo* to *Nadeshiko*: Women and Sports in Japan' in Jennifer Hargreaves and Eric Anderson (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge 2014) pp.97-105; Miho Koishihara, 'A Study on Representations and Gender Norms of "Sporting Girls" in a Girls' Magazine of the 1920s and 1930s,' *Journal of Sport and Gender Studies* 12

academy regarding the cultural crossover between the East and West from a sport and leisure perspective.

Primarily, these findings advance the debate in the field of the gendered experience in sport. The work speaks to the early interaction between men and women in a contact sport, as well as the international integration of women's sport both in and away from its own foundational country, related to the movement of people and ideas.

### **Further Research**

In terms of biographical knowledge of Sarah Mayer herself, although the search for source material for this work has covered not only her home country, but in following the trail, has extended across four continents, there are sure to be, as yet undiscovered resources. As the internet continues to make public records more accessible, the discovery and availability of relevant sources which would help to fill the remaining gaps in the narrative of her life, will only improve, thus aiding the analysis. For instance, the wartime period, where Mayer has been shown to be supporting a patriotic home front through her work, initially with the A.R.P. and latterly in a factory providing 'war work', was outside the scope of this thesis and needs further research, establishing whether she was continuing to pursue her interest in judo, or whether the forces of anti-Japanese feeling in Britain affected her will or ability to participate in such a Japanese sport. This would provide further links for works regarding international sport and wartime activity. There is also more work needed on the connection between the entertainment industry and physical culture. My own post-Doctoral work intends to focus upon the links between the theatre and sport, particularly in relation to the influential early modern theatrical producers and playwrights and combat sports. But this must be placed within a much wider discourse.

Likewise, the thesis has focussed mainly upon Mayer's legacy in Britain, and although the work has discovered, through Japanese archival holdings, that she became a role model for Japanese women to take up judo, her influence in Japan has yet to be revealed. This would be much better determined by a

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(2014) pp.4-18. See also, Takashi Koyama, *The Changing Social Position of Women in Japan* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1961) p.10.

researcher more fluent than I in Japanese, and more *au fait* with Japanese resources and archives.

More broadly, there needs to be much more work into the history of women and their contribution to judo. This thesis would have benefitted from translation of important works by Japanese writers such as Yamaguchi and Mizoguchi, on the history of women in judo.<sup>14</sup> Mizoguchi's Ph.D. thesis, and book on the history of gender in judo were vital to the analysis of Mayer's place within Japanese judo society, and the differentiation between women training through the Butokukai and Kōdōkan.<sup>15</sup> However, it was impossible within the scope of this thesis to have the entirety of her work translated, therefore only a fraction of this rich seam of research has been accessible. Equally, although the Japanese impact on the British art scene following the end of the *Sakoku* has been well documented, the same cannot be said for the huge influence which can be seen through the contemporary press on physical culture across The West, and this subject deserves attention within the academic discourse.

Judo is an important part of British sporting history, and the lack of research, particularly regarding women in the inter-war period, needs to be addressed. In fact, the history of women's individual sport in Britain, and particularly the combative sports for that period, would benefit from more research. As shown in the introduction of this work, team sports, such as football, hockey and cricket have dominated the academy more recently, although there has been some excellent work on female boxers from authors such as Gerald Gems and Gertrude Pfister, and Kasia Boddy.<sup>16</sup> Internationally, the history of women's self-defence has been approached by authors such as Irene Zeilinger, with her paper 'Une brève histoire de l'autodéfense pour femmes',<sup>17</sup> although this is an overarching global history, and Haimo Groenen with 'Les débuts du judo féminin en Belgique de la Libération aux années 1950: émancipation, sport et

<sup>14</sup> Yamaguchi Kaori, *女子柔道の歴史と課題 [Women's Judo: History and Challenges]* (Tokyo: 日本武道館 2012); Mizoguchi Noriko, '女子柔道の誕生: 講道館神話の分析 [The Birth of Women's Judo: An Analysis of the Kodokan Myth], ' (Thesis for Ph.D. University of Tokyo, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Mizoguchi Noriko, *性と柔: 女子柔道史から問う [Gender and gentleness: A history of women's Judo]*. Tokyo: 河出書房新社 2013) [in Japanese].

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Gems and Gertrud Pfister, 'Women Boxers: Actresses to Athletes,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 31:15 (2014) pp.1909–1924; Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books 2008)

<sup>17</sup> Irene Zeilinger, 'Une Brève Histoire de l'Autodéfense pour Femmes,' *Garance* (May 2018).

self-défense', which is post-war,<sup>18</sup> but clearly the history of self-defence in Britain needs more work. As the publications outlined in the introduction to this thesis indicate, my future interests also lie with Britain's place in relation to women's judo history, and my recent paper presented at the first Commonwealth academic judo conference, focussing on the history of women in the Commonwealth, and the forthcoming chapter on 'The global history of women in judo' for Routledge which is in preparation for publication, will hopefully help to provide an introduction for this endeavour.<sup>19</sup>

There were contradictory forces at work for women's sport in Britain during the inter-war period. Key initiatives in women's sport were seen with the foundation of the Women's Amateur Athletic Association in 1923, and the Netball Association and Women's Cricket Association in 1926. But at a time when women's football was being banned from English Football Association grounds, the thesis shows that women's judo was being actively encouraged by a Japanese cultural society in Britain. This contrary position regarding gender within physical culture is just one example where judo history is worthy of more research.

This work shows how Sarah Mayer, a British woman from unconventional and challenging beginnings, embraced feminism through the first wave of the women's movement, and devoted a brief portion of her life to the sport chosen by those women as a form of self-defence against the oppressive violence they encountered through the struggle for equality. The remarkable achievements Mayer attained through her journey as a sports tourist, were only possible due to her rise in social standing, and the accompanying economic stability. However, the thesis has demonstrated that it was actually through the international political ambitions of the Japanese establishment that Mayer became an accidental sporting pioneer for her sex, and her impact and fame was to be short-lived as a result of the global catastrophe that was the Second World War. Despite this, as the first woman to fight against men at the

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<sup>18</sup> Haimo Groenen, 'Les Débuts du Judo Féminin en Belgique de la Libération aux Années 1950: Émancipation, Sport et Self-Défense,' *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29:13 (2012) pp.1819-1841.

<sup>19</sup> Amanda Spenn, 'Ladies of the Commonwealth: The Development of Women's Judo through the Early Twentieth Century,' (paper presented at The Commonwealth Judo Conference, University of Wolverhampton, 28 September 2019).



foundational home of judo, and the first Western woman to be recognised as an expert in Japan, we must consider Mayer as a key figure in global sporting history, and this is her legacy.

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*The Banbury Advertiser*

*The Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*

*The Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald*

*The Birmingham Post*

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*The Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*

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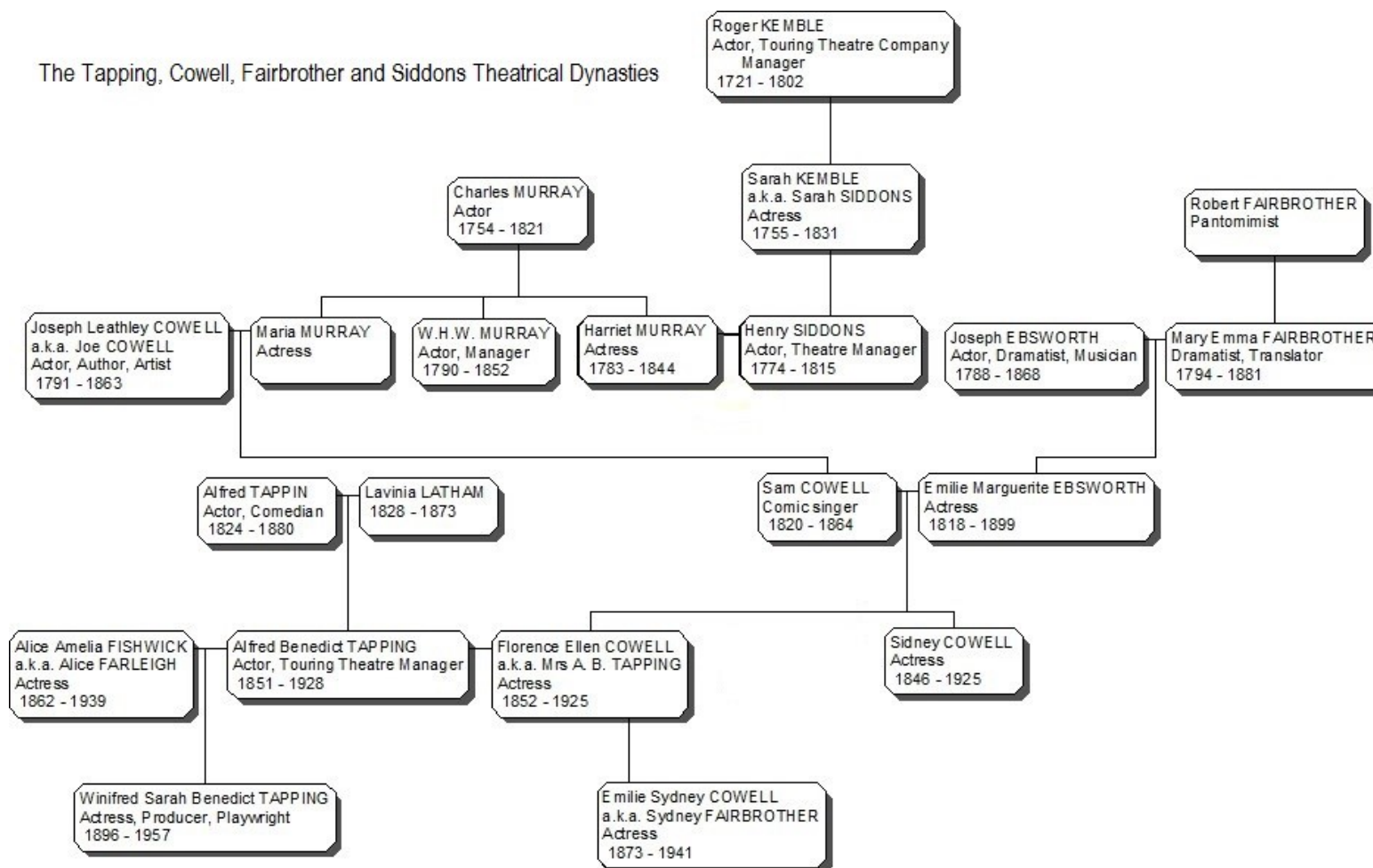
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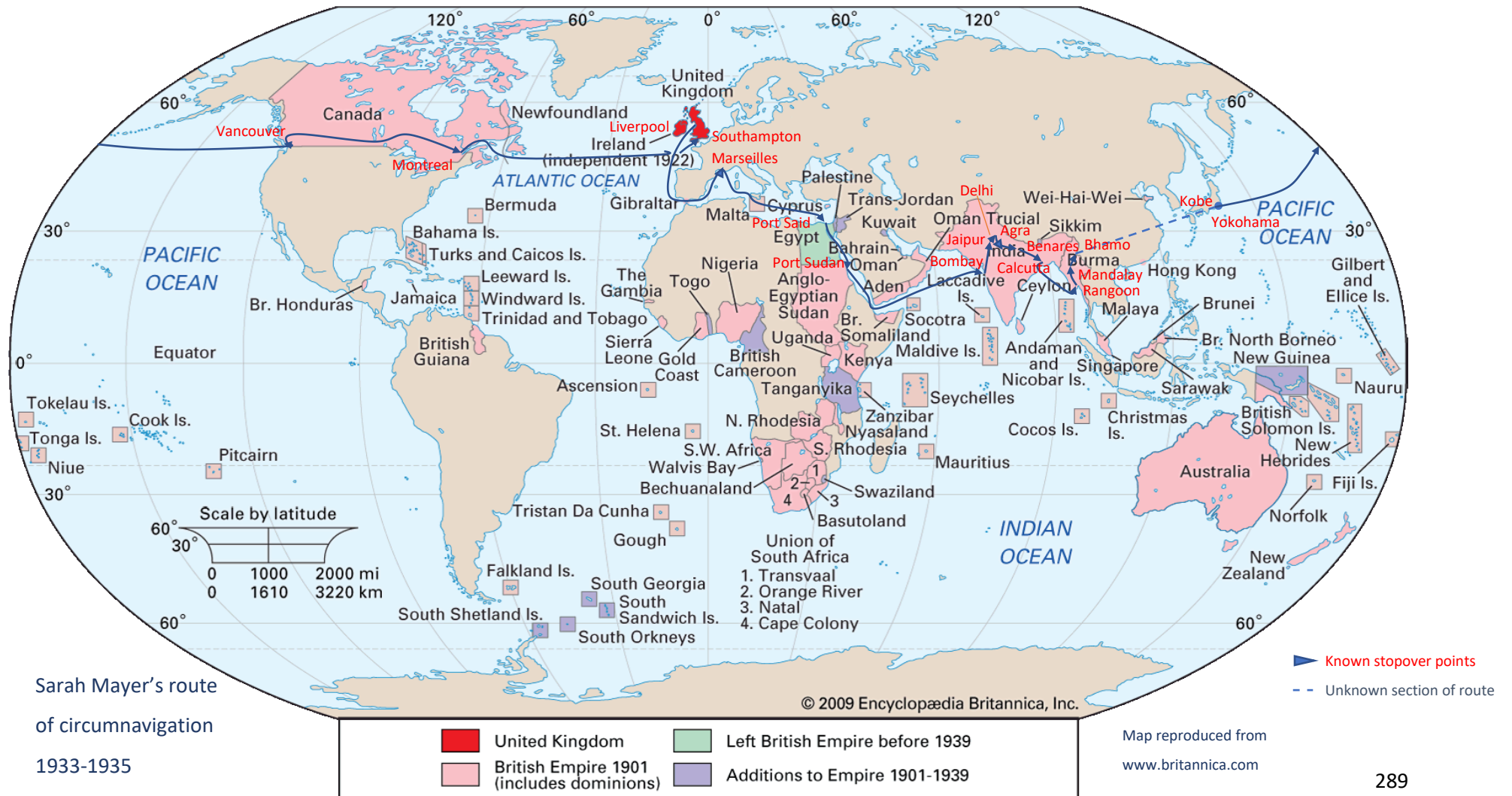
## Appendix One







## Appendix Two



Sarah Mayer's route  
of circumnavigation  
1933-1935

